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# ADVOCATING FOR A TRANSITIONAL BILINGUAL EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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ADVOCATING FOR A TRANSITIONAL BILINGUAL EDUCATION PROGRAM  
FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Sandy Ozimek

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirement of  
Doctor of Education  
in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education  
National Louis University

April, 2014

# NLU Digital Commons Document Origination Statement

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This document was created as *one* part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman, et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner, et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examined the development and implementation of a small Illinois school district's English Language Learner policy, which advocated for the use of a Transitional Bilingual Education program. A number of challenges were addressed to provide English Language Learners with the same opportunity to attain high levels of academic achievement as English proficient students. Common English Language Learner program models were examined, and research that supported or refuted using students' native language to aid in the acquisition of English was considered. An implementation plan addressed these challenges and an assessment plan ensured the policy met its intended goals so all students received the education they deserved.

## PREFACE

When I decided to advocate for an English Language Learner policy for my school district, I knew I was building a program for a student population whose needs had essentially been ignored up until this point. While I knew I needed to have a clear vision of what I wanted in order to bring this initiative to fruition, I was not an expert in English Language Learners (ELL). I realized I needed to learn about and comprehend as much as I could about ELL students and the range of existing programs. I explored what other districts are doing to address the needs of ELL students and talked with a number of educators to build my own background knowledge. The power of inviting others to join in the development of this vision cannot be underestimated as they became my supporters and cheerleaders throughout the whole process of creating and developing a workable plan.

One challenge was acknowledging and addressing the various constraints within which I had to work. Again, I sought out the expert knowledge of others to search for workable options and invited other teachers who wanted to learn more to join me in this venture. Throughout this process, more teachers became interested in learning more about English Language Learners. I knew I had accomplished something great when one teacher requested she have the English Language Learning students in her class next year.

I know I will be building and enhancing more programs in the future. I now feel more confident and comfortable initiating new programs in my school having gone through this process of developing a vision and bringing others on board.

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## **SECTION ONE: VISION STATEMENT**

In January 2013, I accepted a new position as the principal of Fox River Grove School District 3's Algonquin Road School, the district's only elementary school. Although my contract officially began July 1<sup>st</sup>, I wanted to learn more about my new position so I met with the superintendent at the end of March.

During our meeting, I discovered I would also be the district's English Language Learner (ELL) Coordinator. I also learned that the district began a Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) program in the Fall of 2012. Illinois Administrative Code Section 228.25 (2011) states, "When an attendance center has an enrollment of 20 or more limited English proficient students of the same language classification the school district must establish a transitional bilingual education (TBE) program for each language classification represented by those students." In October 2012, the elementary school reached this benchmark with over 20 students whose native language is Spanish. Thus, the school district needed to implement a TBE program for the 2012-2013 school year.

As of March 2013, 19 students whose native language is Spanish would be enrolling at Algonquin Road School. Based on the Illinois Administrative Code Section 228.25 (2011), if no additional students whose native language is Spanish enrolled for the 2013-2014 school year, the district would not need to offer a TBE program. Rather, the district could choose to implement a transitional program of instruction (TPI). Although the components of a TBE program may be included in a TPI program, more flexibility exists with a TPI program. Essentially, a TPI program must include instruction in the student's native language to the extent necessary so the student can keep pace with his/her grade level peers in the core subject areas.



Thus, the critical issue at hand is what type of program the district should establish for English Language Learners given the requirements of the Illinois Administrative Code and the fluctuating numbers of students. The type of program required could easily change from year to year based upon the number of students whose native language is the same. Additionally, the type of program needed could change throughout the year based on the number of students who move in and out of the district.

Another critical piece to this puzzle is the teacher needed to teach the ELL students. A full-time bilingual teacher was hired in October 2012 to establish and implement the TBE program. Unfortunately, the superintendent was not pleased with her performance and the school board chose not to renew her contract. The district has since hired an experienced teacher with the appropriate certification for a TBE program. The type of program the district ultimately chooses to implement will determine the certifications needed by other potential ELL teachers in the future.

A third critical component is the required parent and community participation needed when implementing a TBE program. A parent advisory committee must be established and the majority of the committee's members must be parents or legal guardians of TBE students (Illinois Administrative Code, 2011). This committee is charged with planning, operating and evaluating the TBE program, and members must be trained in a language they can comprehend. The committee is required to meet four times per year and keep minutes of these meetings. Additionally, the committee must review the district's annual program application to the State Superintendent of Education (Illinois Administrative Code, 2011). Thus, getting parents involved and active in this committee will be necessary.

The last critical component is how to overcome staff resistance to the implementation of an ELL program. When I met with the superintendent, he expressed concern that some staff members have been reluctant to change their instruction to meet the needs of ELL students. He alluded to some staff members wanting ELL students out of their classroom for most of the day so they do not need to take responsibility for the students' instruction.

As the school's new leader, I want to create a feasible ELL policy that addresses these critical issues. First, the policy will comply with the Illinois Administrative Code and Illinois School Code. While I believe this is a constraint to which our policy must adhere, the tenets upon which these Codes are based align with my beliefs about English Language Learners and the education to which they should be entitled. Second, the policy will consider what the research indicates is among the best type of program to meet the needs of our ELL students. I want the policy to be flexible enough to allow us to alter the program based upon individual student needs. Additionally, the policy will take into the account the limited financial and personnel resources of the district. Finally, the policy will formalize the district's ELL program to ensure continuity of the program from year to year. I believe this aspect of the policy is vital to serve our English Language Learners in the best way possible.

## **SECTION TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED**

### **Federal Laws and Policies**

Federal laws and policies have evolved over the years and establish requirements to ensure the needs of ELL students are met. First, the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution states, "...No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States... nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws" (U.S. Constitution Amendment XIV). The purpose of this amendment was to ensure that all people are equally protected under the Constitution. Although not explicitly named, English Language Learners should be protected by this amendment. However, additional laws and policies were needed to ensure this was truly the case and were created as questions about the interpretation of the amendment arose.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in any program that receives federal funding (Ragan & Lesaux, 2006). No longer can states and public schools deny students their right to access on the basis of race, color, or national origin.

As a result of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and an increase in immigration, the Bilingual Act of 1968 was born (Stewner-Manzanares, 1988). This Act, also known as Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), was the first federal recognition that students with limited English speaking ability have special educational needs and bilingual programs which address those needs should be federally funded.

On May 25, 1970, the Office for Civil Rights issued a memorandum to clarify the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's policy regarding school districts' responsibilities for educating national origin minority group children who are not English proficient (U.S. Department of Education, 2005b). The memorandum stated that school districts must take affirmative steps to provide equal access to instructional programs for students with limited English proficiency.

Keeping in mind the Office for Civil Right's memorandum, *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) was the first Supreme Court case to interpret what Title VI specifically meant for ELL students. A group of Chinese students sued the San Francisco Unified School District claiming they were denied access to equal educational opportunities under the Fourteenth Amendment because they could not understand English. At issue was whether or not the school district was allowed to treat these students just like any other student or whether the district should be providing the Chinese students with additional help rather than using a "sink or swim" approach. Rather than referring to the Fourteenth Amendment as the basis for their decision, the Supreme Court ruled that the school district violated Section 601 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Beyond Brown, 2004). In his decision Justice William Douglass (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974) stated:

Under these state-imposed standards there is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education... We know that those who do not understand English are certain to find their classroom experiences wholly incomprehensible and in no way meaningful. (p. 566)

As a result of this decision, the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights created the Lau Remedies, which basically require school districts to implement bilingual education programs for ELL students. The Lau Remedies broadened the influence of the Court's decision by requiring all school districts to apply the Remedies, not just those districts that receive federal funds (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, n.d.). Additionally, the Bilingual Education Act was amended, defining a bilingual education program as "one that provided instruction in English and in the native language of the student to allow the student to progress effectively through the educational system" (Stewner-Manzanares, 1988, p. 3). The goal was to prepare students with limited English speaking ability to participate effectively in the regular classroom as soon as possible.

Shortly after the *Lau* ruling, Congress passed the Equal Education Opportunities Act (EEOA) which imposed upon states the need to "take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs" (Denial of Equal Educational Opportunity Prohibited, 1974, pp. 948 & 949). Many people interpreted Section 1703(f) to mean students have the legal right to receive a bilingual education. However, several court cases, one of the most significant being *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981), clarified the interpretation differently.

In *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981), Mr. Castañeda sued the Raymondville Independent School District claiming the district was discriminating against his two children by teaching them in a segregated classroom (Wright, 2010). He argued that the grouping system for classrooms used criteria that were ethnically and racially discriminating. Additionally, he claimed the school district failed to establish bilingual

programs which would have helped his children to overcome language barriers and allowed them to participate equally in the classroom. After the district court ruled in favor of the school district, Mr. Castañeda filed an appeal. In 1981, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit ruled in favor of the Castañedas. While the court disregarded the assumption that *Lau* and the EEOA mandated bilingual education, it found the district fell quite short of meeting the requirements of the EEOA. As a result, the court established a three-pronged test to determine whether or not schools are addressing the needs of ELL students as required by the EEOA. The Castañeda test requires that programs for ELL students must be based on a sound educational theory, implemented effectively with adequate resources and personnel, and evaluated to determine if they are effective in helping students overcome language barriers (Wright, 2010).

The Bilingual Education Act was amended again several times to broaden the definition of eligible students and provide more flexibility to states and local school districts regarding the implementation of programs (Stewner-Manzanares, 1988).

When the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was reauthorized as the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), Title VII (the Bilingual Education Act) was repealed and Title III, *Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students*, was created (Ragan & Lesaux, 2006). One of the key goals of Title III was to ensure that students with limited or no English “attain English language proficiency, attain high levels of academic achievement in English, and meet the same challenging State academic content and student academic achievement standards that all children are expected to meet” (Title III of the ESEA Act of 1965, 2008, p. 24266). Title III provides

states and districts more flexibility in how they spend federal funds on programs in exchange for greater accountability.

Over a decade later, Title III is still in effect. The responsibility for choosing how to address the needs of English Language Learners is shouldered by each state. States are required to establish English proficiency standards, provide high-quality language instruction programs based on scientific research, and provide quality instruction in reading and mathematics (Garcia, 2009). Furthermore, they must provide English Language Learners with highly qualified teachers and annually assess the students' English proficiency as well as reading and mathematics performance.

Reflecting on these federal law and policies clarify what I would like for my school's English Language Learners. Based on Justice William Douglass' statements and ruling in *Lau V. Nichols* (1974), I certainly want to advocate for a policy that assures students will find their classroom experiences meaningful. *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981) informs my thinking by helping me realize that I do not want a policy that is going to segregate English Language Learners for most of the school day. After several conversations with the ELL teacher, I realize the importance of ensuring English Language Learners are in a language-rich environment and have the opportunity to interact with students who are literate in English. Title III of the ESEA Act underscores the need for the policy to move students towards English proficiency as soon as possible so they can meet the academic content and academic achievement standards established for all students.

## **State of Illinois Policies**

Similar to the U.S. Constitution, the Illinois Constitution guarantees every child from kindergarten through grade 12 access to a free public education, which means, regardless of a child's home language, he/she deserves a free and appropriate education (Illinois State Board of Education [ISBE], 1998). According to the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)* of 2001, one of Title III's purposes was "to develop high-quality language instruction educational programs designed to assist states, districts and schools in teaching limited English proficient children and serving immigrant children and youth" (ESEA Section 3102(3) as stated in Language Instruction Educational Programs (LIEPs), 2012, p. viii). As such, Article 14-C of the Illinois School Code recognizes two models to serve ELL students: a transitional bilingual education (TBE) program or a transitional program of instruction (TPI), both with the goal that ELL students become proficient in English and transition into the general education curriculum (Severns, 2012). A TBE program must be established if 20 or more students with a common home language exist in a school. If less than 20 students with a common home language exist in a school, a TPI may be used.

The purpose of a TBE program is to build proficiency in English through instruction in both English and the student's home language. Once the student is deemed proficient in English, he/she is transferred into a regular classroom. A transitional bilingual education program requires several instructional components (Illinois Administrative Code, 2011). First, instruction in core subject areas such as math, social studies, and science must be given in the student's native language and English, and instruction in language arts must be given in the student's native language. Instruction in



English as a second language must also be provided and align to the “English Language Proficiency Standards for English Language Learners in PreKindergarten through Grade 12” which is published on behalf of the WIDA Consortium, a group of states dedicated to the design and implementation of high standards and equitable educational opportunities for English Language Learners. Finally, students must also be instructed on theirs or their parents’ native land’s history and culture as well as the history and culture of the United States. A student may be in a TBE program for all or part of the day, depending on the school’s specific program and the child’s level of English proficiency.

In contrast to a TBE program, a TPI often includes the components of a TBE program while providing more flexibility. Essentially, a TPI must include instruction in the student’s native language to the extent necessary for the student to keep pace with his/her grade level peers in the core subject areas (Illinois Administrative Code, 2011). ELLs with different home languages may be in the same classroom, depending upon their age and level of English proficiency. This allows schools with few ELL students to maximize their bilingual/ELL teachers.

While I understand the rationale behind a Transitional Bilingual Education program, I struggle with how this type of program can be realistically implemented in a school district like mine that encompasses nine different grade levels and has limited financial resources. I believe our English Language Learner policy will need to be flexible enough to allow us to be creative in how we meet the constraints of a TBE program. For example, I think one of our challenges will be instructing students in math, social studies, and science in English and students’ native language across all nine grade levels with one ELL teacher and one ELL aide while also instructing students in language

arts in their native language. Additionally, the implementation may become even more challenging if we have newcomers to our district who speak little or no English.

### **Demographics**

In a nation of 49.8 million K-12 students, more than five million English language learners attend our schools today (Goldenberg, 2013). This means that more than 10% of all K-12 students' primary language is a language other than English (Garcia, Jensen, & Scribner, 2009). During the 2011-2012 school year, Illinois public school districts enrolled 197,388 ELL students with 58.54% of those students enrolled in Cook County school districts, which include the state's largest district, Chicago Public School District 299 (ISBE, 2011). ELL enrollments increased by about 14,000 students from the previous year. McHenry County, the county in which Fox River Grove School District 3 is located, enrolled 3,479 students.

While the terms English language learner and limited English proficient are essentially synonymous, children from immigrant families and immigrant youth are not (Garcia et al., 2009). When one considers the need for ELL programs, these diverse populations have different needs with varied implications.

According to the New America Foundation, immigrant youth are defined as "children who are either foreign-born or have at least one foreign-born parent" (Severns, 2012, p. 1). Children in immigrant families are the fastest growing population of children in the United States (Garcia et al., 2009). Immigrant youth comprise an estimated 25% of the population under 18, the highest proportion during the last 75 years. About 25% of immigrant children live in households where no one over the age of 13 speaks entirely in English or very well (Garcia et al., 2009). Seventy-nine percent of immigrant children

were born in the U.S., which means they are U.S. citizens and will likely continue to live in the U.S. as an adult. In order for these children to become productive and self-sufficient members of society as adults, they need to be able to take full advantage of school and develop, along with native English speakers, the skills necessary to speak, read, write, and understand English.

While over 350 languages are spoken in the United States, Spanish is the predominant language of ELL students (Garcia et al., 2009). More than one in five students in the United States is Latino, and the U.S. Census projects more than 28% of all K-12 students will be Latino by 2025 (Gándara, 2010). Mirroring the nationwide statistics, Spanish is the predominant language of ELL students in Illinois. In the 2011-2012 school year, Spanish was the native language of 81.1% of Illinois' ELL students (ISBE, 2011). Only 2.8% of the population's home language was Polish, which was the second most common native language in Illinois.

Although ELL students vary in age, the majority of ELL students are prekindergarten to grade five students. The concentration of ELL students tends to be in the early grades because students who enter preschool or kindergarten as ELLs often develop oral and academic English proficiency by the time they are in third grade (Garcia et al., 2009). During the 2011-2012 school year, 64.5% of Illinois' ELL students were in prekindergarten to third grade, 25.6% were in grades 4 through 8, and 9.8% were in high school (ISBE, 2011).

The statistics in regards to Fox River Grove's English Language Learners are similar. Of the 47 English Language Learners in my school district, 57% of the students are in kindergarten through third grade. The percent of students in fourth through eighth

grades is 43%, which is higher than the 2011-2012 statistic mentioned previously. The predominant language of our English Language Learners is Spanish although a few students' native language languages are Polish and Hindi. The majority of students are immigrant children; only three of the students were born outside the United States. I believe knowing my district and its schools are in a similar situation to other school districts in Illinois may be helpful as I may be able to use their policies as a model from which to create an English Language Learner policy for my district.

### **ELL Academic Achievement**

Regardless of whether a school implements a TPI or TBE program, the research indicates the importance of offering some type of language support program for English Language Learning students. In Lindholm-Leary and Borsato's 2006 synthesis of the empirical research on English language learners, they discovered that English Language Learners did the worst on various academic measures when they received no special instruction or language support and were simply mainstreamed into the regular education classrooms (*Language Instructional Educational Programs*, 2012, p. xvi). Thomas and Collier (2002) found similar results. They learned that English Language Learners who attended mainstream programs because their parents refused language support services showed significant decreases in their reading and math achievement by fifth grade when compared to students who participated in the language support programs. They also found the largest number of dropouts came from this group, demonstrating the long-term impact the lack of language support might have.

Even when students take advantage of language support programs, they still struggle compared to the peers whose native language is English. On the 2009 National

Assessment for Education Progress (NAEP), more than 70% of all fourth- and eighth-grade English Language Learning students scored below “Basic” in reading and math. The exception was fourth-grade math in which only 43% of English Language Learning students scored below “Basic” (*Language Instructional Educational Programs*, 2012). Additionally, most of the 2009 NAEP data demonstrate a decrease in English Language Learners’ performance compared to data from the 2007 administration. Furthermore, many English Language Learners do not participate in NAEP due to exclusions by their state or school district. This means that the least proficient English Language Learners are likely not even part of these statistics. One could reasonably assume that if they were, the numbers would probably be much lower.

Further analysis of the average NAEP reading scale scores from 1998 to 2011 demonstrates a gap between English Language Learners and non-English Language Learners. This gap ranges from 35 to 49 scale score points for fourth graders and a range of 40 to 47 scale score points for eighth graders (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012). An analysis of the average NAEP math scale scores from 1998 to 2011 demonstrates similar gaps. This gap ranges from 23 to 28 scale score points for fourth graders and a range of 37 to 46 scale score points for eighth graders (NCES, 2012). Thus, English Language Learners continue to struggle in relation to their non-English Language Learning peers on national tests.

Looking at the NAEP data from a local perspective, 92.4% of fourth-grade English Language Learning students in Illinois participated in the 2011 NAEP reading test. The majority of these students, 77.4%, scored below “Basic” and no English Language Learning students scored “Advanced,” which is the highest achievement level

(Illinois State Report Card, 2012). In regards to the 2011 NAEP math test, 93.5% of fourth-grade English Language Learning students in Illinois participated in this test. Similar to the results on the reading test, 46.4% of fourth-grade English Language Learning students scored below “Basic” and 0.8% scored “Advanced”.

While 91.2% of eighth-grade English Language Learning students in Illinois participated in the 2011 NAEP reading test, 67.9% of these students scored below “Basic” and similar to the fourth-grade English Language Learning students, no students scored “Advanced” (Illinois State Report Card, 2012). Only 89.9% of eighth-grade English Language Learning students in Illinois participated in the 2011 NAEP math test. The majority of these students, 69.5%, scored below “Basic” and no students scored “Advanced”.

Illinois’ state assessment, the Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT) demonstrates the struggles of English Language Learning students as well. Only 51.1% of English Language Learning students met or exceeded standards on the 2012 ISAT reading test (Illinois State Report Card, 2012). In a similar vein, 69.8% of English Language Learning students met or exceeded on the 2012 ISAT math test (Illinois State Report Card, 2012). Thus, Illinois’ English Language Learning students did not meet the 85% target needed to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

ISAT data is not reported for English Language Learning students in Fox River Grove School District 3. The state of Illinois only reports data for subgroups of 45 or more. In 2012, Fox River Grove School District 3 only had 11 English Language Learning students; thus, no data was reported by the State.

While one may argue that NAEP and ISAT assessments are not appropriate assessment tools for measuring the knowledge of English Language Learners, the tests are still being used in this regard. Knowing this will be helpful as I develop our English Language Learner policy because I will likely want to consider ways to measure this population's progress, which is useful and appropriate.

### **Economic and Social Analysis**

Although the existence of ELL programs can be costly, one must consider the cost of not offering such programs in terms of the effect on students and society. One way to analyze this is to consider the cost of high school dropouts. While the size and growth of the Latino population is rapidly increasing, Latinos are the most likely to drop out of school (Gándara, 2010). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2012), dropouts are defined as those persons 16 to 24 years old who are not enrolled in school and have not earned a diploma or GED certificate. In 2010, the dropout rate for Hispanics was 15.1% compared to 5.1% for Whites or 8.0% for Blacks (Illinois State Report Card, 2012).

This trend has grave consequences for the dropouts, their communities, the larger community, and our society as a whole. In fact, not enough jobs exist for the number of students dropping out, especially permanent, decent-paying jobs (Gándara, 2010).

Studies show that a typical high school graduate will obtain higher employment and earnings and will be less likely to rely on public funds for health care and welfare. Furthermore, they contribute more in tax revenues due to their increased income, which benefits society as a whole. Finally, high school graduates are less likely to be involved in criminal activity (Levin & Rouse, 2012).

One may also want to consider that ELLs are more likely than native-English speaking students to come from low-income families (Garcia et al., 2009). In 2000, 68% of ELLs in grades preK-5 lived in low-income families compared to 36% of English-proficient students. Similarly, 60% of ELLs in grades 6-12 lived in low-income families compared to 32% of English-proficient students. Furthermore, ELLs are more likely to have parents with limited formal education. Almost half of pre-K to grade 5 students and 35% of grade 6-12 students had a parent with less than a high school education compared to 11% and 9% respectively of English-proficient students.

Studies of foreign-born immigrants help to underscore the economic benefit of investing in ELL programs to help immigrant students become proficient in English. Grenier (1984) found that Hispanic male workers, due to their lack of English skills, typically earn one-third less than non-Hispanic white males (Grenier, 1984). Zhen (2013) concurs stating, “The acquisition of English language has been shown to be important to their labor market success for foreign-born immigrants in the United States” (p. 30). He continues by pointing out that immigrants who speak fluent English will earn on average 17.7% more than those who are not fluent.

Thus, while educating ELL students can be costly, a greater cost likely exists to students and society if we do not invest in programs to help students become proficient in English.

So what does it cost to educate an ELL student? The answer depends on whom you ask. Jimenez-Castellanos and Topper (2012) conducted a review of cost study literature as it related to the treatment of ELLs. While the definition of “adequate” education varied in the studies they reviewed, they found that evidence-based funding



recommendations in terms of per pupil funding ranged from a low of \$41 per ELL student in Arizona to a high of \$719 per ELL student in Wisconsin with a national aggregate of \$719 per ELL student (Jimenez-Castellanos & Topper, 2012). At Fox River Grove School District 3, a total of \$41,976 was spent in the 2012-2013 school to educate 35 ELL students. This dollar amount included salaries, benefits, purchases services, and supplies and materials and equaled \$1,199 per ELL pupil.

### **Moral Analysis**

Regardless of the fact that the law makes school attendance compulsory for all students, English language learners should be adequately educated from a moral and ethical perspective. A professor of education at Boston College whose work focuses on moral and ethical issues in education, Starratt (2005) states, "...there is a basic level of respect and dignity with which human beings deserve to be treated" (p. 125). As educators in the United States, part of our obligation is to act as a public servant responsible for providing certain services to its citizens (Starratt, 2005). One of these services is to educate all children by providing the necessary supports for students to be successful regardless of their native language.

The way in which English language learners are viewed has implications for the types of policies adopted. Churchill (as cited in Corson, 2001) created a framework upon which to rank official policy responses to the issues of minority language rights. His framework identifies six stages of policy responses to linguistic minorities. Stage One views minority language speakers as having a language deficit, which means that they do not have a grasp of the dominant language. A policy based on this stage would likely offer students support through ESL instruction with the goal of transitioning students to

the dominant language as soon as possible. Stage Two views a linguistic minority student as having a language deficit that is linked to family status. Thus, a typical policy response is to offer ESL instruction as well as special measures to help the student adjust to majority society such as youth programs, counseling, and social work. Stage Three views the deficits as stemming from the failure of the majority society to recognize, understand, and positively view the culture of the minority. Policy responses to this stage focus on the right to be different and respected for the difference. Students are expected to learn the dominant language for schooling and the long-term. However, students may continue to use their native language for the short-term with their family for the next generation or two. Schools with policies at this stage often emphasize multicultural education and sensitivity to cultural differences. Stage Four assumes that learning deficits are caused by the failure to fully develop the student's native language. Thus, a typical school policy response is to offer transitional bilingual programs in which the students continue to learn their native language to the extent necessary to achieve competence in the English language. Stage Five recognizes the right of students to maintain and develop their native language as part of their culture in their private lives; however, by the time the student is 10 to 12 years old, he/she is expected to begin transitioning to the majority language. Policies at Stage Six focus on language equality. In this stage, the minority and majority languages are believed to be of equal value and status. Although the Bilingual Education Act attempted to place U.S. ELL policy at Stage Four, Corson (2001) identified the U.S. as being in Stage One or Stage Two as evidenced by schools' typical implementation of bilingual programs.

Based upon Churchill's framework, the maintenance and development of students' native languages can be perceived as a right, privilege, or barrier by educators and policymakers. The language of instruction is likely the most critical of aspect of ELL policy decisions. Thus, educators and policymakers must carefully examine the various implications of this decision when setting ELL policy.

As I contemplate crafting my district's English Language Learner policy, I want to remain vigilant to ensure the policy, at a minimum, places our district in Stage Five of Churchill's Framework. While I believe students have the right to maintain and develop their native language, I realize constraints exist which may hamper the ability of our district to reach Stage Six.

### **SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT**

The primary goal of any school district's English Language Learner policy should be to ensure that all students receive equitable access to the curriculum. The Office of Civil Rights memorandum (May 25, 1970) requires school districts to take affirmative steps to provide equal access to instructional programs for students with limited English proficiency. While the Board policy and current Board members support this overarching goal, I am advocating for Fox River School District 3 to create and implement a policy in which instruction for students is appropriately differentiated to meet their academic needs specifically through the use of a Transitional Bilingual Education program model (see Appendix A).

The objective of this policy is to provide students with the greatest possible access to the core curriculum and to appropriate English language instruction so students can progress from limited English proficiency to fluent English proficiency. As noted earlier, based on the requirements set forth by the state of Illinois, our district needs to provide equal access to the curriculum using either a Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) program or Transitional Program of Instruction (TPI), depending on the number of students enrolled in the school whose native language is the same. When a school district has 20 or more students in one school whose native language is the same, the district is required to implement a Transitional Bilingual Education program. If the school district has less than 20 students in one school whose native language is the same, the district can implement a Transitional Program of Instruction. At Algonquin Road School, which is the district's elementary school, the number of students whose native language is the same has been right around the 20-student mark for the past two years. Thus, the type of

program implemented could vary from year to year depending on the enrollment. I believe the district should implement a Transitional Bilingual Education program to provide consistency from year to year and to maximize the opportunity for students to learn the English language while still receiving support in their native language.

As one considers whose needs, values, and preferences are being represented by this policy, I cannot help but focus first on the student. The student's education is and should be any educator's number one concern. A Transitional Bilingual Education program is designed to help students acquire the English skills needed to succeed in the English-only mainstream classroom. The program aims to build proficiency in English through instruction in both English and the child's home language. One of the benefits of this type of program is the student's sense of pride in his parents' language is preserved. This helps protect the student's sense of identity since the language and culture of his family and heritage is acknowledged and valued. Additionally, students are often pulled out for some of their instruction throughout the day with peers whose native language is the same as theirs. This enables the student to feel more comfortable asking questions and taking risks and realize other students are in the same situation. Furthermore, because this type of program requires an instructor who is fluent in the student's language, the student is able to fully communicate with at least one person in a teaching role in the school. The student is still able to socialize with his peers during non-core instructional times of the day, helping to develop the student's social language and skills.

Parents' needs and values are also met through a Transitional Bilingual Education program. At least one person in the school is able to communicate with parents because the instructor is fluent in the parents' native language. The instructor is able to translate

any important communications from the school to ensure the parents are kept abreast of what is happening. This helps to reduce the sense of isolation non-English speaking parents may feel and makes possible a home-school partnership. Furthermore, the parents know their child is going to learn English but are able to feel more secure knowing their child is being supported through the journey.

The school district's needs, values, and preferences are also met through the implementation of a Transitional Bilingual Education program. In today's world of education, high-stakes testing and accountability is at the forefront. All students must take the Illinois Student Achievement Test, which is administered only in English, even for students who are not proficient in English. The results from this test are made available to the public and used, rightly or wrongly, by the public to make decisions. Families often look at these scores when determining in what area they might want to live. Schools are judged by these scores, even though they do not necessarily provide a full and accurate picture.

A Transitional Bilingual Education program enables the school district to provide a curriculum that more closely matches the language abilities of its students than an English-only curriculum. Students receive instruction in both their native language and English, which helps students to better understand what they are learning. As Krashen (1997) states, "The combination of first language subject matter teaching and literacy development that characterizes good bilingual programs indirectly but powerfully aids students as they strive for a third factor essential to their success: English proficiency" (p. 2). Furthermore, students are still able to spend part of their school day with their English-only peers so they are not deprived of this opportunity to socialize and learn.

The school district is able to do all of this while maintaining a reasonable budget for its English Language Learner program. Fox River School District employs one full-time teacher and one full-time paraprofessional for its ELL program. These two individuals serve all of our English Language Learner population through pull-out and push-in support. While the money received from the State of Illinois covers some of the cost of the paraprofessional, the school district still picks up the majority of the cost for this program as we do not have enough English Language Learners to apply for a Title III grant. Thus, the district needs to be focused on the fiscal reality as we design our program and policy.

That said, I believe this policy is one that is realistic and appropriate for the district. Our district's mission, "Educational Excellence Is the Pathway to a Successful Future" is further elaborated in our six belief statements, four of which are reflected in the policy for which I am advocating.

One of the belief statements is "We believe all children can learn and reach their full potential." Our goal as a school district is to instill a belief in all of our students that they can learn and do great things. While reaching their full potential may be more challenging for some students than others, we want to work towards this goal for all of our students. Student motivation can play a huge role in what students can accomplish and we want them to know we believe they can do anything they set their mind to doing and will support them in whatever ways we can to reach their potential. For our English Language Learners, this means providing them with additional support so they can eventually participate meaningfully in the English-only mainstream classroom.

Another belief statement is “We believe learning is cultivated in a safe, nurturing and respectful environment.” I think a Transitional Bilingual Education program provides this type of environment for English Language Learners. Students are not being thrown into the English-only mainstream classroom and curriculum with the hope that they “swim” rather than “sink”. Instead, a TBE program offers them a supportive, nurturing environment and allows them the time to be able to make a smooth transition by scaffolding their instruction.

The third applicable belief statement is “We believe open and effective communication creates active partnerships.” As mentioned previously, a Transitional Bilingual Education program offers opportunities for open and effective communication between students and the teacher as well as between the parents and the school. Furthermore, one of the requirements for implementing a Transitional Bilingual Education program in Illinois is creating a parent advisory committee comprised of parents, the transitional bilingual teacher, and community members. This committee meets at least four times per year to participate in the planning, operation, and evaluation of the district’s TBE program. This committee will help to foster open and effective communication with the parents of English Language Learners and create an active partnership between the school district and parents of English Language Learners.

The final belief statement is “We believe a highly qualified, committed and motivated staff is critical to optimal learning.” This is true for all of our students including English Language Learners. The district has hired a bilingual teacher who is fluent in Spanish and meets all of the credentials required by the State. Furthermore, our paraprofessional’s native language is Spanish. Both of these individuals are committed



to the education and overall well-being of our English Language Learners. In addition, they educate the rest of the staff about English Language Learners and what they can do to help meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of these students.

### **Challenges Faced in the Policy Development**

Determining what the district's policy should be has not been easy. While the Illinois School Code has provided some guidance, this same document has also provided a number of constraints stemming from the federal requirements. As soon as an attendance center has 20 students whose home language is the same, a school has no choice but to implement a TBE program. That program, however, can look very different from school to school. My school district is fortunate that the English Language Learner population comes mostly from families whose home language is Spanish. We were able to find both a bilingual teacher who is fluent in Spanish and curriculum materials in Spanish as needed. However, if our population's home language was Urdu, we would be facing a very difficult situation as teachers who are fluent in Urdu are not readily available nor are curriculum materials. This is true for a number of languages and many school and districts are struggling with this very situation. Furthermore, we are constrained by the lack of funding provided by the state and federal governments for the implementation of English Language Learner programs. At this point, my district can only afford to hire one bilingual teacher and one paraprofessional. Considering these two people are responsible for educating and supporting about 35 to 40 students in two buildings, their time is stretched very thin.

Even though our situation is a little easier to address, I struggle with the requirement of having a parent advisory committee and what this will look like in

practice. The majority of our students whose home language is Spanish do not have parents who are fluent in English, and the language barrier discourages them from actively participating in school activities and events (Staehr Fenner, 2014). Furthermore, my impression based on our current struggles to get English Language Learners' parents involved in their child's education is that parents may not want to be involved in the school to the extent required by Illinois School Code. Although the parents want the school to provide what they feel is best for their child, they face a number of other challenges, with financial struggles being at the forefront. Zarate (as cited in Staehr Fenner, 2014) cites work demands that prevent parents from attending school events as a reason for low Latino parent involvement. Many are limited in their education and as Gándara (2010) states, "...Latino parents – especially if they do not speak English – often feel they have nothing to contribute. For this reason, these parents are less likely to be involved in their children's schools" (p. 62). Although we have made a concerted effort this year to help English Language Learners' parents be more involved in their child's education, I am not sure we are yet at the point where they would feel comfortable being a member of a parent advisory committee.

The last aspect that makes the development of this policy difficult is the lack of consistent policy on English Language Learner programs. Each state develops its own entry and exit criteria for these programs. This creates problems when a student moves from one state to another. Suddenly, a student who was considered an English Language Learner and supported appropriately, no longer qualifies for an English Language Learner program because he has crossed a state border and that state's entry criteria are different. Additionally, as of 2006, all states were required to administer English

language proficiency tests annually to English Language Learners in addition to the state content tests (Hakuta, 2011). The problem is that the English language proficiency test can vary from state to state so the results cannot be compared and used to determine what models work best to educate English Language Learners.

Despite these constraints, I believe we need to create and implement a policy in which instruction is appropriately differentiated to meet students' academic needs through a Transitional Bilingual Education program. The students, parents, and school district's needs are met with this program model. Furthermore, the model is aligned with our school district's mission and belief statements. Most important, a Transitional Bilingual Program education model provides students with the ability to grow academically while offering them support as they do so.

## **SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT**

Bilingual education legislation has existed in the United States since 1839 when the state of Ohio consented to the use of German-English instruction in public schools at a parent's request (National Latino Children's Institute, 2001). In 1968, the Bilingual Education Act authorized the federal government to provide funding to local school districts who instructed their English Language Learners using native-language instruction. Bilingual education was adopted as a federal policy in 1974 when the Equal Educational Opportunity Act was passed in an attempt to ensure that children whose native language was not English had equal access to education and would receive assistance to become fluent in English, the dominant language of the United States. Many states began bilingual programs in the 1960's and 1970's in response to the passage of this act.

In the 1990's, pushback against bilingual programs in favor of English-only programs occurred by citizens in California and later spread to Arizona and Massachusetts (Gándara, 2012). English-only advocates viewed bilingual education as "needless pampering of immigrants" (Hakuta, 2011, p. 163), arguing for English-only programs focused on intensive English instruction rather than instruction in a student's native language.

The result was two camps with conflicting values: one side who honored students' heritage and culture and one side who honored where students were heading, i.e., getting students immersed into the American way of life beginning with the language. The public debate still continues, with ongoing conflict about which approach to take. In fact, the passage of Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001 gave

states more flexibility by allowing them to choose how they want to address the needs of English Language Learners. Although California and Arizona replaced their bilingual programs with English-only programs, Illinois has remained steadfast in its bilingual program approach to educating English Language Learners.

While five broad categories of programs for English Language Learners exist in the United States today, two programs focus on English proficiency and the remaining three falls under an umbrella of bilingualism.

The first two program models focus solely on developing students' English language skills. English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction focuses on the development of proficiency in the English language, including grammar, vocabulary, and communication skills. The single intended outcome of this program is English proficiency. Students are often pulled out of other classes for short periods of time to work with a specialist or they may have an ESL class specifically dedicated to this instruction.

The other model focused solely on English proficiency is Sheltered Instruction (SI). In this model, instruction focuses on the teaching of academic content rather than the English language itself although specialized techniques may be used to accommodate English Language Learners' needs. Because students' native language does not come into play with this model, students may or may not have the same native language. The goals of this model are for students to become proficient in English and to be prepared to meet the academic achievement standards.

Three bilingual education models are primarily in use in the United States today. The first model is the transitional bilingual education (TBE) or early exit model, which is

the most common form of bilingual education in the United States (National Latino Children's Institute, 2013). This model emphasizes English language development and academic learning. Instruction in the student's native language allows him to keep up with his peers academically while he learns English although the implementation of this model varies greatly in practice. Students enrolled in this program model usually exit the English Language Learner program within three years. This model is used ideally with students in kindergarten or first grade so the students can exit by third grade (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). While the student's native language is used to transition the student to the second language, native language proficiency is not a goal of this program model (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Another model is the developmental or late-exit model. This model focuses on full bilingualism and encourages oral fluency, literacy, and academic learning in both English and the student's native language. Students usually begin this program in kindergarten or first grade and receive all of their instruction in their native language. They transition slowly to English, and by the end of the program, use a 50/50 language balance (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Although the goals of this model include proficiency in English and preparation to meet academic achievement standards, bilingualism and bi-literacy are also a goal. To meet these goals, students usually participate in this model for five or more years (American Federation of Teachers, 2002).

The third model is two-way or dual immersion bilingual education, in which half of the students are native English speakers and half of the students are English Language Learners who speak the same native language. All of the students receive instruction in both languages with the goal of all students developing academic proficiency in both

languages. Due to the complexities involved with this approach, this type of program usually engages students for five or more years.

### **Bilingual Education Research Studies**

To figure out which is the most effective program model, one would logically want to examine the research. This is no easy task, however, because the research does not allow for straightforward comparisons. As the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) stated in their policy brief (2002),

To date, no camp has been able to gather enough definitive evidence to resolve the dispute and gain consensus on the best way to accelerate achievement (which, for most ELL students, has been improving at a rate that is alarmingly glacial). Given the state of the research, this is understandable. (p. 3)

Part of the problem is a set program objective does not exist. For some programs, the main objective is to develop students' English language proficiency as quickly as possible (AFT, 2002). This means annual measures of students' English reading, writing, speaking and listening skills are necessary to determine students' progress towards proficiency. Additionally, the rate at which students are moved into mainstream classrooms is vital. On the other hand, some programs' primary objective is academic success across the curriculum. Thus, other measures of long-term success, such as high school graduation and college attendance rates, might be more important than immediate gains in English proficiency.

The assessment poses another problem. If the goal of the assessment is to test students' academic knowledge, translating the statewide or district-wide assessments into

a different language can create technical problems and validity issues (AFT, 2002).

Furthermore, assessment of students' knowledge of English can be problematic because different tests focus on different aspects of language ability and may be based on differing definitions of proficiency. As a result, schools may be able to alter the number of identified English Language Learners depending on which proficiency test they choose to use. This is troublesome because which students are identified as English Language Learners can significantly differ from study to study, resulting in an apples-to-oranges comparison.

Finally the definitions of "ESL," "bilingual," and "immersion" vary greatly among states, school districts, and even classrooms (AFT, 2002). Thus, a program might be classified as bilingual in one school district and a program with the same characteristics may be labeled ESL in another district. Further complicating the issue is the actual implementation, which varies widely depending on other programs in the school and the availability of staff and resources.

All of these inconsistencies contribute to the complex task of comparing studies in the hopes of figuring out the best way to educate English Language Learners. According to the two expert panels convened by the National Research Council in the 1990s to review the research on English Language Learners, most existing studies at that time had serious flaws (AFT, 2002). However, the two groups did agree that, when all else is equal, some native language instruction is preferable to no native language instruction. However, the amount of native language instruction, duration, and context of the program is still up for debate.



The studies undertaken on bilingual education have created a complex web in which each side can find evidence to support his/her position, providing no clear-cut answers. As one can see from the studies cited below, researchers use each other's studies to provide a starting point for his/her own research and to offer a critique of the research with which they don't agree.

An early study, released by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) in 1978, conducted an evaluation of 38 bilingual programs. In this evaluation, Spanish-background students who participated in bilingual education programs were compared to Spanish-background students who participated in English-only classrooms (Garcia, 2009). Researchers concluded "there was no significant continuing impact of the Title VII bilingual programs on student outcomes" (Gándara, 2012, ¶3). A major flaw surfaced, however, because two-thirds of the Spanish-background students in the English-only classrooms had previously taken part in bilingual education programs. Thus, the program labels were taken at face value and did not clearly specify what constituted a bilingual or English immersion classroom.

In 1980, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Planning and Budget requested a review of the research literature on the effectiveness of bilingual education (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Baker and deKanter conducted a simple meta-analysis on 28 studies of bilingual education they considered procedurally sound. They concluded that the evidence in favor of bilingual education was not significant enough to warrant mandating this program model. Critics argued that Baker and deKanter were biased in the studies they chose to include in their meta-analysis and their simple vote count method was methodologically weak (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

One such critic was Willig who conducted a meta-analysis of studies of bilingual education in 1985. She concluded that transitional bilingual education was better than other program models. However, she excluded a large number of studies from her meta-analysis. In fact, a meticulous reading of her results actually demonstrates transitional bilingual education to be inferior to English-only instruction. Only when she controlled for other variables did transitional bilingual education become superior (Rossell & Baker, 1996).

In 1991, the results of a second federally funded longitudinal study that became known as the “Immersion Study” were released. The purpose of this study was to compare the effectiveness of structured English immersion and late-exit transitional bilingual education programs with early-exit transitional bilingual education programs (National Research Council, 1992). In the hopes of avoiding similar criticisms as the 1978 study, this study was more carefully conducted by observing actual instruction in the classrooms. While sufficient evidence was collected to conclude that the transitional bilingual program offered from kindergarten to first grade resulted in better reading outcomes than the English immersion program, too many other variables made further definitive conclusions impossible.

In 1996, Rossell and Baker (as cited in Cummins, 1998) published a review of research studies that is often cited by opponents of bilingual education. They maintained that in ten studies comparing transitional bilingual education (TBE) with structured immersion in reading performance, no difference was found in 17% of the studies and structured immersion was superior in 83% of the studies. However, according to Cummins (1998), when one more closely examines the research studies, he finds that

ninety percent of the studies demonstrate the effectiveness of bilingual and trilingual education.

### **Language Acquisition in a Bilingual Transitional Education Program**

Based on the difficulties of comparing studies and the reality that many states' bilingual policies are predicated on theoretical frameworks for bilingualism in young children, I argue for a policy that uses students' first language to help them learn English, a second language.

Cummins' theoretical framework is based on the underlying theory of bilingual education and makes a distinction between two kinds of language proficiency. The first kind is Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) that incorporates the "surface" skills of listening and speaking which are often quickly acquired by students (Shoebottom, 2013). The second type of language proficiency to which Cummins refers is Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), which is the academic language students need to succeed in the classroom (Severns, 2012). While students can develop BICS within two years of immersion in the second language, students often need between five and seven years to acquire CALP. Thus, as educators, we should not assume that students have academic language proficiency even though students exhibit a high degree of accuracy and fluency in everyday spoken English.

Furthermore, Cummins argues the common underlying proficiency (CUP) in a student's native language helps him or her to develop proficiency in the second language. The common underlying proficiency is the "set of skills and implicit metalinguistic knowledge that can be drawn upon when working in another language" (Shoebottom, 2013, ¶4). The CUP provides the base for the development of both languages. As the

CUP expands in the first language, the second language is positively impacted. As Cummins (2000) states, “Conceptual knowledge developed in one language helps to make input in the other language comprehensible” (p. 39). If a student understands a concept in his native language, then he simply needs to acquire the label for the concept in the second language. If, however, he needs to acquire both the label and the concept, he will face a much more difficult task.

Krashen (2013) poses a similar theory. Krashen argues that instruction in a student’s first language helps him to understand the second language. This works for two reasons. The first is that when a teacher teaches a subject matter in the student’s first language, the student acquires knowledge. This knowledge then helps to make the English the student hears and reads comprehensible because he already has the background knowledge needed to understand. For example, if a student is learning what a triangle is in his first language, he will understand that a triangle is a closed figure composed of three straight lines. Now to learn what a triangle is in the second language, all he has to do is learn the word for the concept because he already knows that the shape is a closed figure composed of three straight lines.

The second reason is that developing literacy in the first language provides a short-cut to literacy in the second language. Once a person can read in one language, he can read in another language. This is true even when the writing systems are different as evidenced by ability of reading to transfer from Chinese to English, from Japanese to English, and from Turkish to Dutch (Krashen, 1999).

A common argument against bilingual education is that people have succeeded without it. However, this is a misconception. Frequently a person’s native language

helps him or her learn English even though the native language is not explicitly used to teach the second language. When one closely examines the details of language acquisition, he finds the same concepts are being employed in the examined situation as those expressed in bilingual education acquisition theories (Krashen, 1999).

For example, Rodriguez (as cited in Krashen, 1999) reports that he succeeded in school, acquiring a high level of English literacy without participating in a program to learn English. However, he had two advantages. First, he grew up in an English-speaking neighborhood in California so he got quite a bit of exposure to comprehensible input from those around him, or what Cummins would refer to as Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (Shoebottom, 2013). Second, he became an avid reader, which helped him to gain the academic language he needed to succeed, what Cummins would refer to as Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (Severns, 2012). Many English Language Learners today do not have these advantages. They often live in neighborhoods where their native language is spoken and only encounter English at school. Furthermore, many English Language Learners have limited access to books and do not have the support needed to read them (Krashen, 1999).

Another example is de la Peña (as cited in Krashen, 1999), who came to the U.S. when he was nine years old and did not know any English. He reports he rapidly learned the English language. However, de la Peña had the advantages of bilingual education. As a fifth grader in Mexico, he had mastered the subject matter because he was literate in Spanish. When he came to the U.S., he was placed into third grade and his knowledge of subject matter made the English content more comprehensible (Krashen, 1999). When students already are literate and have knowledge of subject matter, they are likely to

succeed in learning a second language.

Krashen (2000) identifies three components of successful bilingual programs. First, the program should provide for subject matter teaching in the student's first language. Second, literacy development in the student's first language should occur. Finally, comprehensible input in English should exist which means direct support for English language development should occur through ESL classes or sheltered instruction.

Based on the research on bilingual education and how students acquire a second language, I advocate for a policy that will establish and implement a Transitional Bilingual Education program. This policy will be based upon Cummins' language acquisition theory as well as some of Krashen's components of a successful bilingual program. Furthermore, this policy will help us achieve a minimum of Stage Five in Churchill's framework, recognizing the right of students to privately maintain and develop their native language but eventually transition to English. Thus, we will utilize students' native language while helping them gain proficiency in English.

## **SECTION FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

In looking at the current Board policy regarding English Language Learners, many of the components needed to implement a Transitional Bilingual Education program have already been addressed. However, a few alterations are needed. Therefore, in Appendix A, I have included the current Board policy as written and indicated the changes or additions to the policy in italics.

As I contemplate how to implement this policy, I need to consider several components including staff development plans, schedules, program budgets, progress monitoring activities, and parent involvement.

### **Staff Development Plans**

Since English Language Learners spend the majority of their day learning content area material with content area teachers, all teachers should possess the knowledge and skills to work with these students. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, the majority of teachers in my school do not currently have this knowledge. This lack of preparation is not unusual. In fact, a 2008 study conducted by Ballantyne, Sanderman, and Levy shows that only 29.5% of teachers who have English Language Learners in their classroom have the training to effectively educate them (Staehr Fenner, 2014). While preservice teacher education programs are now focusing on the education of this population, I need to consider how to best educate my current staff to effectively teach these students.

The English Language Learning teacher and I started to educate the staff this year. During a recent faculty meeting, the English Language Learning teacher presented a lesson to my staff in Spanish so the teachers could begin to understand how English Language Learners might feel in their classrooms. The teacher integrated some strategies

as she progressed through the lesson. For example, she used sounds to convey specific animals and she pantomimed some actions like shoveling. Even though the lesson lasted only about 45 minutes, the session appeared effective. One teacher stated that she had a greater appreciation for the effort her English Language Learning students put forth to comprehend whatever they could. Another teacher commented about the difficulty of remaining attentive when she knew she would not understand what was said. Finally, another teacher shared how frustrated the students must feel since they may only be able to understand bits and pieces of what is being taught.

Our intent was for this experience to set the stage for further professional development. The English Language Learning teacher then met with each team of teachers to discuss their English Language Learning students and what strategies might be helpful to use in the regular education classroom. The teacher also explained the WIDA (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment) Can Do Descriptors are and how to use them in conjunction with the ACCESS test results to better understand what the reading, writing, speaking, and listening proficiency levels indicate about their students' abilities. Furthermore, she explained how the Can Do Descriptors might help teachers differentiate their instruction for English Language Learners and what teachers can expect their students to know and be able to do based upon their students' English proficiency levels.

Another component of staff development is a basic awareness of how we may intentionally or unintentionally be excluding English Language Learners and their families from the school community. For example, in the past, holding parent/teacher conferences with the parents of English Language Learners was not always possible if the



parents did not speak English. This year, the English Language Learning teacher and I created a schedule for parent/teacher conferences for those families who required the use of a translator. We scheduled the conferences for siblings back-to-back so the families only needed to make one trip to the school. The classroom teacher and families met with the English Language Learning teacher who provided the necessary translations. This allowed the parents to learn about their child's progress and hopefully helped them to feel involved in their child's education. The teachers appreciated this time with the families so they could communicate the accomplishments of the students and address any concerns they or the family had.

One of our intentions this year is to increase communication between the school district and our English Language Learning families. The staff is currently not in the habit of including this population in their communications so a concerted effort is underway this year. The English Language Learning teacher and I informed the staff that any communications provided to English proficient families should also be provided in Spanish. Thus, the English Language Learning teacher has translated a number of documents sent home from the superintendent, the teachers, or myself this year including letters about required drills, conference forms, field trip forms, and monthly newsletters.

Staff development continues and will continue to be a focus throughout this year and future years. The English Language Learning teacher will be meeting with each grade level team once per month to discuss their English Language Learners and specific strategies to help them progress. Additionally, staff members are encouraged to attend workshops that focus on English Language Learners and then share what they learned

with their teammates. As we potentially hire new staff in the coming years, competence with English Language Learners is a skill we will seek.

Although the current Board policy does not specifically address staff professional development, I believe the policy should do so. Therefore, I have added a separate section to the policy which specifically provides for at least one yearly professional development opportunity for all teachers to increase their knowledge about English Language Learners and acquire strategies to support these students in all facets of their education and socialization.

### **Schedules**

One of the challenges we face each year is how to schedule services for our English Language Learners. The amount of services required by our English Language Learning population can vary from year to year based upon their English proficiency levels. Furthermore, we have English Language Learners both at our elementary and junior high schools. Currently, the two students most in need of services are at the junior high since they arrived in the United States from Mexico last year speaking no English. Because of the way the junior high schedule is set up, these students receive support from either the English Language Learning teacher or paraprofessional during their content area classes as well as during their study hall. Students at the elementary school are pulled out for English language instruction during a part of their literacy block. They receive additional support from the paraprofessional who pushes into their classrooms during math, science, and/or social studies instruction.

While I would ideally like to set a consistent schedule to follow each year, this is not realistic to do as the students and their needs change from year to year. The English

Language Learning teacher and I have agreed to meet at the beginning of each year to discuss the students and their needs. Then based upon the personnel resources available, we will create a schedule that addresses students' specific needs, with the understanding the schedule may need to change throughout the year. This procedure has worked well for us so far this year and the current Board policy supports this practice (see Appendix A).

### **Program Budget**

The program budget for the English Language Learning program includes a full-time TBE teacher, a full-time paraprofessional, and curricular materials. The current Board policy calls for the district to comply with any requirements to receive grant money from the State or federal governments (see Appendix A). Although the number of English Language Learners is not large enough to warrant the receipt of federal grant money, the district does receive grant money from the State of Illinois. However, this dollar amount is minimal and does not even cover the cost of the paraprofessional. Therefore, a large majority of the money spent on the program comes from the district itself.

When the English Language Learning program was formally established last year, budgeted monies were spent to purchase English picture dictionaries and several components of the National Geographic Reach program. These purchases totaled about \$2,500. For the 2013-14 school year, \$800 was originally budgeted for curriculum materials. However, when the superintendent budgeted this amount, he did not realize that curriculum materials were previously purchased only for first and third grades and did not include materials for each grade level.

The English Language Learning teacher and I met to discuss how to best spend the budgeted monies and realized we did not have enough money to purchase the Reach materials for each grade level. We created a proposal to submit to the superintendent outlining the desired materials and the attached dollar amounts, which totaled about \$3,000. Because the superintendent understood that the previous year's program was put together in a haphazard manner and the monies not spent in the most effective way, he approved the proposal and encouraged us to purchase what we needed to make this a solid program.

After further investigation by the teacher, we learned we have access to all of the Reach grade level components online. Therefore, we decided not to purchase print copies of some components of the program. When I spoke with the superintendent to let him know we would likely not need all of the monies, he said he would still keep the \$3,000 available should we find other supplemental materials that would benefit our program. In each coming year during my budget discussion with the superintendent, I will recommend a specific dollar amount for curriculum materials based upon our upcoming needs.

### **Monitoring Progress**

While the state-mandated ACCESS test provides information about students' levels of English proficiency and addresses our current Board policy (see Appendix A), the test is only administered once per year and does not provide timely feedback. Likewise, our school district benchmarks all of our students three times per year using AIMS Web and MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) testing. While these results are useful, they still do not provide frequent enough information regarding student progress.

Therefore, we need to find and use a tool to frequently monitor our students' progress.

We have chosen as a district to monitor students' progress using the tests available from the Reach curriculum. At the beginning of each year, our English Language Learners take an English Level Proficiency Pre-Test. This test assesses the students' vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension skills. The scores for each component of the test are combined into one score, an English Proficiency Level, which informs placement into the appropriate instructional group. Throughout the year, students are assessed at the end of each unit using the unit tests. These tests assess students' grammar, reading, and writing skills. If taken online, the program provides re-teaching and guided practice suggestions so specific areas of difficulty can be addressed. Finally, at the end of the year, an English Level Proficiency Post-Test is administered. Similar to the pre-test, this test assesses students' vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension skills and combines the scores to produce an English Proficiency Level. The pre-test and post-test English Proficiency Levels can be compared to determine the growth in proficiency levels achieved throughout the year.

Progress is also monitored using an English Language Learner Progress Report. This progress report is provided to parents each quarter along with the student's regular report card. The skills addressed on the progress report are consistent with the WIDA standards and address the areas of speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Since this is truly the first year students' progress is being monitored, we are keeping a close eye on how students are progressing and adjusting the program as necessary. Furthermore, we are monitoring students who have exited from the English

Language Learning program by examining their benchmark data to be sure they are making adequate progress without the English Language Learning program support.

### **Parent Involvement**

While the current Board policy does acknowledge parent involvement and states that parents will be “given an opportunity to provide input into the program” (see Appendix A), nothing is in place nor is further guidance provided to parents as to how to engage. Therefore, the revised policy should acknowledge the existence of and purpose of a parent advisory committee. Further information about this committee should be presented to English Language Learner parents when they are notified about their child’s placement in the program.

A parent advisory committee will need to be established. However, as previously indicated, recruiting parent participants may be challenging. Therefore, as a starting point, I would recommend using focus groups whose purpose is two- fold: first, to elicit parents’ feedback about our current program, and second, to use this time as an opportunity to further establish and build relationships with parents.

I suggest using focus groups for several reasons. First, I believe focus groups lead to relationship building since the participants are able to interact with the facilitators in a casual setting. Facilitators in our focus groups would include the English Language Learning teacher and paraprofessional; both speak Spanish and have had prior contact with the parents. This prior contact between the teacher and/or paraprofessional and the parents may encourage more parent participation since a relationship has already been established. My hope is that parents will feel more welcome in our schools and more likely to consider becoming a member of the parent advisory committee once the

importance and purpose of the committee has been explained. Furthermore, a focus group provides an avenue for more give-and-take, allowing the facilitators to clarify the meaning of vague comments and probe further to obtain a deeper understanding of participants' opinions about the Transitional Bilingual Education program.

Once the parent advisory committee has been established, the requirements set forth by Illinois Administrative Code 228.30 will be followed (Illinois Administrative Code, 2011). All English Language Learner parents will be encouraged throughout the year to share any concerns or feedback about the program with committee members. My hope is that if parents do not feel comfortable bringing forth concerns to school personnel, they will feel comfortable going to their peers who are on the committee. Then committee members can share the concerns so the committee can address the matter.

## **SECTION SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN**

To monitor the progress and implementation of the policy, feedback from several groups of stakeholders and the analysis of data will be considered in an effort to ensure the policy is meeting its intended goals.

A survey will be administered to all teachers whose students participate in the English Language Learning program to elicit their level of satisfaction with the program. The survey will contain questions regarding the amount of time students spend in the ELL classroom, whether or not the teachers feel their students' needs are being met through the TBE program, and whether or not they feel their students are adequately prepared when the time comes for students to exit the program and fully transition back to the regular education classroom. Furthermore, the survey will elicit teachers' opinions regarding the need for further professional development. Teachers' feedback about the need for further professional development will aid the administrators in planning for future professional development and provide information about their current comfort level in teaching English Language Learners.

To elicit feedback from parents whose students participate in the program, I recommend promoting the existence and purpose of the parent advisory committee. This promotion can be done at the beginning of the year as well as throughout the year. Among other tasks, this committee is charged with evaluating the district's English Language Learner program, which will help ensure the policy is meeting its intended goals.

Feedback from students will be elicited through focus groups. Since focus groups are done orally, most of our students should be able to adequately participate since



English Language Learners' speaking and listening skills develop prior to their reading and writing skills. The use of focus groups will hopefully take advantage of students' comfort levels with familiar individuals by allowing students to voice their true feelings about the program when surrounded by other students with whom they share a common bond. The discussion can address how they feel about the Transitional Bilingual Education program as well as their concerns about transitioning from the program. Gaining information about their transitioning concerns will help us as we continue to develop our program and put plans into place to make the transition back to the regular education classroom as smooth as possible.

As mentioned previously, pre- and post-test data from the Reach curriculum will be used internally to monitor students' movement towards English proficiency. However, on a broader scope and long-term, I believe our ACCESS test scores can also offer insights as to whether or not our students are moving towards English proficiency and how quickly we are accomplishing this goal. These scores can also be analyzed to determine the areas in which we need to enhance our curriculum and instruction. For example, if students are moving quickly from one level to the next in their speaking and listening skills but plateau for several years in their reading and/or writing skills, this tells me we need to carefully examine the reading and writing components of our curriculum to make sure it meets our students' needs.

Information regarding our English Language Learners program will be shared with the school district's Board of Education on an annual basis. The current Board is very interested in the development of our English Language Learning program. In fact, the Board president attended one of our professional development activities to educate

himself about English Language Learners and often asks questions at our monthly meetings in regards to how the program is going. Information regarding the year's current English Language Learner enrollment and number of program participants will be shared along with a summary of the feedback from teachers, parents, and students. An analysis of students' ACCESS, MAP, and ISAT scores will accompany further program recommendations.

By monitoring the progress of our English Language Learners and evaluating the results of the implemented policy as perceived by teachers, parents, and students, I hope to provide direction for future recommendations to refine and strengthen our Transitional Bilingual Education program. The intent of the program is to meet students at their current level of English proficiency and move them to full proficiency while providing students with the greatest possible access to the core curriculum and appropriate English language instruction.

## **SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY OF IMPACT STATEMENT**

The impact of creating and implementing a policy in which instruction is appropriately differentiated to meet English Language Learners' academic needs through the use of a Transitional Bilingual Education program model cannot be underestimated. This program model utilizes students' native language to foster their English language development by providing conceptual knowledge and a common underlying proficiency.

Although this policy's main focus is on the student as an English Language Learner and what will best serve his/her academic needs, the policy at the same time satisfies the demands of the Illinois School Code. While a Transitional Bilingual Education program is not as flexible as a Transitional Program of Instruction, this disadvantage is offset by the consistency provided from a model that may remain the same from year to year. Deciding to implement a TBE program model regardless of the number of English Language Learners relieves us of having to worry about changing our model simply because our enrollment of English Language Learners is more than nineteen students.

This policy fulfills the intent of Title III, essentially ensuring that English Language Learners are able to develop English language proficiency and meet the academic content and academic achievement standards that all students are expected to meet. Furthermore, this policy is consistent with the school district's mission and belief statements.

Through the use of an assessment plan to monitor progress and evaluate the outcomes of the implemented policy, teachers, parents, and students will have a voice in the policy's implementation and an opportunity to recommend ways to further strengthen

the program and execution of the policy. These stakeholders will be afforded a chance to express their opinions and become more involved as the program grows.

Through this policy, I hope to create an environment in which English Language Learners can work towards English proficiency, meet or exceed standards, and feel supported by teachers and staff. I want their families to feel welcome in our school and a part of the school community. I want teachers to feel supported and prepared to teach all students. Finally, I want a program of which our school district can be proud, knowing we put all students first, regardless of the language they speak.

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## APPENDIX A: RECOMMENDED CHANGES TO BOARD POLICY 6:160

Below is Fox River Grove School District 3's current Board Policy 6:160 (2011). The italicized text indicates the recommended additions or changes to the policy.

### Instruction

#### English Language Learners

The District offers opportunities for resident English Language Learners to develop high levels of academic attainment in English and to meet the same academic content and student academic achievement standards that all children are expected to attain. The Superintendent or designee shall develop and maintain a program for English Language Learners that will:

1. Assist all English Language Learners to achieve English proficiency, facilitate effective communication in English, and encourage their full participation in school activities and programs as well as promote participation by the parents/guardians of English Language Learners.
2. Appropriately identify students with limited English-speaking ability.
3. *Provide a Transitional Bilingual Education Program (TBE) which complies with State law.* ~~Comply with State law regarding the Transitional Bilingual Educational Program (TBE) or Transitional Program of Instruction (TPI), whichever is applicable.~~
4. Comply with any applicable State and federal requirements for the receipt of grant money for English Language Learners and programs to serve them.
5. Determine the appropriate instructional program and environment for English Language Learners.

6. Annually assess the English proficiency of English Language Learners and monitor their progress in order to determine their readiness for a mainstream classroom environment.
7. Include English Language Learners, to the extent required by State and federal law, in the District's student assessment program to measure their achievement in reading/language arts and mathematics.
8. Provide information to the parents/guardians of English Language Learners about: (1) the reasons for their child's identification, (2) their child's level of English proficiency, (3) the method of instruction to be used, (4) how the program will meet their child's needs, (5) specific exit requirements of the program, (6) how the program will meet their child's individualized education program, if applicable, and (7) information on parent/guardian rights.  
  
Parents/guardians will be regularly apprised of their child's progress and involvement will be encouraged.

#### Staff Development

*Fox River Grove School District 3 will provide at least one yearly professional development opportunity for all teachers to increase their knowledge about English Language Learners and acquire strategies to support the District's English Language Learners in all facets of their education and socialization.*

#### Parent Involvement

Parents/guardians of English Language Learners will be: (1) given an opportunity to provide input to the program *through the Parent Advisory Committee whose purpose is to participate in the planning, operation, and evaluation of programs*, and (2) provided

notification regarding their child's placement in, and information about, the District's English Language Learners programs.