

English Language Learners in Texas

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Since people of Mexican descent trace their presence in Texas for almost 500 years, is not surprising that today, the Latin population (35.7%) in Texas, experiences an ethnic minority majority status; and, ethnically this group is overwhelmingly Mexican (Hispanic Pew Center, 2004; U.S. Census, 2007b). Eighty-four percent (84%) of Latins in Texas are of Mexican origin (US Census, 2007b). The Mexican American population is more than triple the African American and almost double the other ethnic minority groups combined. Spanish speaking children from Latin families are entering schools in increased numbers (U.S. Census, 2007a). In Texas, English Language Learners (ELL) are growing faster than teacher education programs can produce bilingual teachers. In most districts, especially in urban areas, this shortage has reached a severe, crisis level.

This paper is part of a symposium presented at the *2008 Annual American Educational Research Association* conference, which examined Texas' bilingual teacher preparation. It describes the growth and academic outcomes of Spanish speaking English Language Learners and includes information on the language policies in Texas guiding programs for this group.

English Language Learners

Almost one person in five (19.7%) in the United States, age 5 and over, speak a language other than English at home (US Census, 2007a). In Texas, 34% speak a non-English language; and, 86% of these individuals the language is Spanish. Demographic data describing Texas' child population indicate that 95% are native born, 45% are Latin, and 90.5% attend public schools (US Census, 2006b).

Data from the 2006-2007 school year, show that the ethnic and racial distribution of the 4.6 million students enrolled in PK-12 Texas public schools include: African American, 14.4%; Latin, 46.3%; White, 35.7%; and, other 3.6% (Texas Educational Agency, 2008c). More than half of the student population, 55.5% were categorized as economically disadvantaged. Sixteen percent (16%) were identified English Language Learners (ELLs); and, one in seven (14.8%) received Bilingual or ESL special language program services.

ELL Growth

In Texas, numbers of linguistically diverse children continue to increase. The most recent educational statistics reported in the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) for 2006-07 showed a 1% Latin student increase from the previous year; with .2% of these students classified as ELLs. Over an eight-year period the number of Latin students has almost doubled; and, the identified English Learner population has increased by 2.3 percentage points (Texas Educational Agency, 2008b). See Table 1: Texas Student Enrollment Growth: Total, Latin, ELL, 1999-2007.

Table 1: Texas Student Population Growth: Total, Latin, ELL, 1999-2007

Year	Total State Enrollment	Total Latin Students	% Latin Students	Total Identified ELLs	% Identified ELLs
2006-2007	4,576,933	2,118,867	46.3	679,352	14.8
2005-2006	4,505,572	2,040,449	45.3	657,716	14.6
2004-2005	4,383,871	1,961,549	44.7	631,534	14.4
2003-2004	4,311,502	1,886,319	43.8	606,190	14.1
2002-2003	4,239,911	1,811,882	42.7	572,019	13.5
2001-2002	4,146,653	1,728,059	41.7	542,312	13.1
2000-2001	4,059,619	1,646,508	40.6	509,885	12.6
1999-2000	3,991,783	1,578,967	39.6	498,222	12.5

Source: Compiled AEIS Data for 1999-2000 through 2006-07 from the Texas Education Agency (2008b).

Academic Outcomes

Texas uses established criteria to monitor and evaluate achievement outcomes for ELLs. Progress criteria includes (a) passing the standard on the English-version Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) reading/ELA test, (b) reaching proficiency level on the Reading Proficiency Tests in English (RPTE), based on years in U.S. schools for first-time RPTE testers; or (c) showing progress on the RPTE from the previous year. According to the *2007 Comprehensive Annual Report on Texas Public Schools* (Texas Educational Agency, 2008a), in the 2006-07 school year, statewide, “70% of the current and monitored LEP students met one or all of the ELL progress criteria, an improvement of four percentage points from the previous year” (p. 4).

Students can be tested in an English or a Spanish version of TAKS; or, they can be exempt from testing if they are new immigrants in their first or second year in the country. Table 2a and Table 2b show the results from the 2007 TAKS English version. These tables include the scores for all students, Latin students, and ELLs. Data for the Spanish version presented in Table 3a and Table 3b include information for all ELLs, as well as, ELLs classified at risk, economically disadvantaged, and those placed in special education programs. Table 4: TAKS ELL Exempt, 2007, provides numbers and percentages of ELLs exempted from the English or Spanish TAKS version. Each is discussed.

English TAKS Version. Three general trends indicating under achievement in the TAKS English version at all grade levels prevail:

1. ELLs are lower in all subject areas than the general student population as a whole and lower than Latin students.
2. The percentages meeting passing rates in all subjects decrease at exceedingly high rates for ELLs in middle and high school; and
3. While achievement problems in science is especially evident. Texas’s students, in general, do poorly in science; however, the passing rates for ELLs are significantly lower than those of all students and lower than Latin students. The differences in science range between 21 to 48 percentage points lower than all students and 13 to 37 percentage points lower than Latin students.

See Table 2a: *English Version of TAKS: Percentage Meeting TAKS Passing Rates, 2007 in Reading, Mathematics, Science and Writing* and Table 2b: *English Version of TAKS: Percentage Meeting TAKS Passing Rates, 2007 in Reading or English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies* below.

Table 2a: English Version of TAKS: Percentage Meeting TAKS Passing Rates, 2007 in Reading, Mathematics, Science and Writing

Grade	Reading	%	Mathematics	%	Science	%	Writing	%
3	All Students	89	All Students	82	--	--	--	--
	Latin	85	Latin	78	--	--	--	--
	ELLs	80	ELLs	76	--	--	--	--
4	All Students	84	All Students	86	--	--	All Students	91
	Latin	79	Latin	83	--	--	Latin	80
	ELLs	66	ELLs	75	--	--	ELLs	83
5	All Students	92	All Students	94	All Students	31	--	--
	Latin	89	Latin	92	Latin	23	--	--
	ELLs	73	ELLs	85	ELLs	10	--	--
6	All Students	92	All Students	79	--	--	--	--
	Latin	89	Latin	74	--	--	--	--
	ELLs	67	ELLs	56	--	--	--	--
7	All Students	85	All Students	76	--	--	All Students	93
	Latin	79	Latin	69	--	--	Latin	91
	ELLs	41	ELLs	44	--	--	ELLs	67
9	All Students	86	All Students	60	--	--	--	--
	Latin	80	Latin	49	--	--	--	--
	ELLs	38	ELLs	22	--	--	--	--

Source: Data compiled from 2007 comprehensive annual report on Texas public schools: A report to the 80th legislature from the Texas Education Agency, Texas Educational Agency (2008a). (--) indicates students were not tested in that subject at that grade level.

Table 2b: English Version of TAKS: Percentage Meeting TAKS Passing Rates, 2007 in Reading or English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies

Grade	Reading Gr 8 English/LA Gr 10, Gr 11	%	Mathematics	%	Science	%	Social Studies	%
8	All Students	89	All Students	71	All Students	70	All Students	87
	Latin	84	Latin	64	Latin	59	Latin	82
	ELLs	49	ELLs	36	ELLs	22	ELLs	53
10	All Students	84	All Students	63	All Students	58	All Students	86
	Latin	79	Latin	54	Latin	45	Latin	81
	ELLs	34	ELLs	24	ELLs	14	ELLs	46
11	All Students	90	All Students	80	All Students	77	All Students	94
	Latin	85	Latin	72	Latin	66	Latin	90
	ELLs	33	ELLs	44	ELLs	33	ELLs	63

Source: Data compiled from 2007 comprehensive annual report on Texas public schools: A report to the 80th legislature from the Texas Education Agency, Texas Educational Agency (2008a). (--) indicates students were not tested in that subject at that grade level.

Spanish TAKS Version. Some ELLs take exams in Spanish. Data from students taking the TAKS Spanish version reveal the following:

1. Almost all ELLs are also classified as at risk and economically disadvantaged; and, low numbers are placed in special educational programs, 2% or less.
2. The number of students authorized to take the TAKS Spanish version decrease significantly at Grade 5 and 6.
3. In all subject areas tested, there is little or no change in the percentages of passing rates between all ELLs and those classified as at risk or economically disadvantaged; and,
4. Passing percentages are higher in reading and writing than mathematics and science, with science having the lowest passing percentage rates.

See Table 3a: Spanish Version of TAKS (Reading, Mathematics and Writing): Percentage Meeting TAKS Passing Rates, 2007 and Table 3b: Spanish Version of TAKS (Reading, Mathematics, and Science): Percentage Meeting TAKS Passing Rates, 2007.

Table 3a: Spanish Version of TAKS (Reading, Mathematics and Writing): Percentage Meeting TAKS Passing Rates, 2007

Grade	Reading	Tested	%	Mathematics	Tested	%	Writing	Tested	%
3	All Students	28,975	81	All Students	26,155	73	--	--	--
	At-Risk	28,249	81	At-Risk	25,431	73	--	--	--
	Econ Dis	27,127	81	Econ Dis	24,433	73	--	--	--
	Special Ed	776	62	Special Ed	777	59			
4	All Students	17,144	77	All Students	14,756	72	All Students	18,149	89
	At-Risk	16,662	77	At-Risk	14,305	72	At-Risk	17,663	89
	Econ Dis	16,138	77	Econ Dis	13,897	72	Econ Dis	17,095	89
	Special Ed	428	62	Special Ed	406	56	Special Ed	456	75
6	All Students	998	75	All Students	902	56	--	--	--
	At-Risk	942	74	At-Risk	853	57	--	--	--
	Econ Dis	892	74	Econ Dis	811	56	--	--	--
	Special Ed	07	71	Special Ed	04	---			

Source: Data compiled from 2007 comprehensive annual report on Texas public schools: A report to the 80th legislature from the Texas Education Agency, Texas Educational Agency (2008a). (--) indicates students were not tested in that subject at that grade level.

Table 3b: Spanish Version of TAKS (Reading, Mathematics, and Science): Percentage Meeting TAKS Passing Rates, 2007

Grade	Reading	Tested	%	Mathematics	Tested	%	Science	Tested	%
5	All Students	7,867	78	All Students	5,834	50	All Students	4,957	35
	At-Risk	7,717	78	At-Risk	5,677	50	At-Risk	4,837	36
	Econ Dis	7,411	78	Econ Dis	5,469	49	Econ Dis	4,656	35
	Special Ed	143	59	Special Ed	98	43	Special Ed	68	21

Source: Data compiled from 2007 comprehensive annual report on Texas public schools: A report to the 80th legislature from the Texas Education Agency, Texas Educational Agency (2008a). (--) indicates students were not tested in that subject at that grade level.

Not-Tested. The not tested population includes absent students, one time exempted recent immigrant ELLs and those evaluated as having limited English proficiency. The Admission, Review, and Dismissal Committee (ARD) can also exempt students (Texas Educational Agency, 2008a). The majority of not tested students at the elementary level are identified as ELLs. See Table 4 TAKS ELL Exempt, 2007 below.

Table 4 TAKS ELL Exempt, 2007

Grade	Total Number Not Tested	%	Number ELL Exempt	%
3	3,566	2.0	2,660	1.5
4	3,160	2.4	2,715	2.0
5	4,465	3.2	3,213	2.3
6	4,462	3.3	3,903	2.9
7	5,846	4.1	4,961	3.5
8	6,131	3.9	4,319	2.7
9	12,946	6.2	6,615	3.2
10	5,736	3.6	2,301	1.5
11	5,188	10.9	n/a	n/a

Source: Data adapted from 2007 comprehensive annual report on Texas public schools: A report to the 80th legislature from the Texas Education Agency, Texas Educational Agency (2008a, p. 64).

Retention Rates: Retention rates are another marker of achievement outcomes. Data from the Texas Educational Agency (2008a) for the 2005-2006 school year show the following:

1. Retention rates across grade levels — elementary and secondary — are almost double for ELLs than for other students (non-ELLs).
2. In Grades K-6, retention rates for ELLs who do not receive special language program services are similar to those in bilingual or ESL programs.
3. Retention rates middle school and high school show that ELLs enrolled in bilingual programs have significantly lower retention rates than those enrolled in ESL programs and those who receive no language program services. This indicates higher achievement success for ELLs served by bilingual programs.

Table 5a Grade-Level Retention by ELL status and Services Received Grades K-6, 2005-06

ELLs	Number Students Retained	Rate (%)
Students in Bilingual Program	13,038	4.6
Students in ESL Program	5,390	4.3
ELLs in Special Education	559	5.5
ELLs with no Bilingual/ESL Services (a)	942	4.0
Total ELL Students (b)	24,777	5.0
Non-ELLs	51,179	2.8

Source: Data adapted from *2007 comprehensive annual report on Texas public schools: A report to the 80th legislature from the Texas Education Agency*, TEA (2008a). [a includes ELLs whose parents did not give permission for participation in special language programs; b includes ELLs whose information on services received or parental permission is incomplete.]

Table 5b Grade-Level Retention by ELL status and Services Received Grades 7-12, 2005-06

ELLs	Number Students Retained	Rate (%)
Students in Bilingual Program	23	08.1
Students in ESL Program	12,239	12.6
ELLs in Special Education	1,586	15.7
ELLs with no Bilingual/ESL Services (a)	1,040	14.3
Total ELL Students (b)	19,471	13.9
Non-ELLs	113,449	06.6

Source: Data adapted from *2007 comprehensive annual report on Texas public schools: A report to the 80th legislature from the Texas Education Agency*, TEA (2008a). [a includes ELLs whose parents did not give permission for participation in special language programs; b includes ELLs whose information on services received or parental permission is incomplete.]

Other indicators of achievement include access to college readiness coursework and high school graduation rates. Statewide only 8.7% of ELLs students took advanced placement courses compared to 21% of the total student population and 16.6% Latin student rates. Data for the class of 2006 show that the graduation rate, 41.8% for students in bilingual or ESL programs is notably below the state rate, 80.4% (Texas Educational Agency, 2008a).

Language Policies

Chapter 89, Adaptations for Special Populations, Subchapter BB, Commissioner's Rules Concerning State Plan for Educating Limited English Proficient Students in the *Texas Administrative Code* (Texas Educational Agency, 2007) stipulates language policy (89.1201), discusses Bilingual/ESL program requirements (89.1205), and explains exceptions and waivers to existing policy (89.1207). This comprehensive document also describes: program content/design (89.1210), procedures for assessment of students' home language (89.1215), role and formation of language proficiency assessment committees (89.1220), issues related to testing and classification of students (89.1225), eligibility of students with disabilities

(89.1230), the participation of non-limited English proficient students (89.1233), facilities (89.1235), parental authority and responsibility (89.1240), staffing and staff development (89.1245), required summer school programs (89.1250), and program evaluation procedures (89.1265). Basically, the state of Texas requires school districts to provide “every student in the state who has a home language other than English and who is identified as limited English proficient” with “full opportunity to participate in bilingual education or English as a second language program.” District personnel must identify ELLs, provide Bilingual or ESL programs, seek certified teachers, and assess these students’ academic progress. The goal is to insure that ELLs become competent in the English language.

Required bilingual/ESL Programs/Exceptions and Waivers. Each school district with 20 or more ELLs in the same grade, pre-kindergarten through Grade 5 (Grade 6 is included if housed in an elementary school), must provide special language programs. Districts who are unable to provide bilingual education, must offer ELLs with English as a Second Language (ESL) programs regardless of student’s grade level, home language, or number of such students. Districts who cannot provide bilingual or ESL programs, must apply for an exception and waiver; which, if granted by the commissioner of education are valid for one academic school year. Additionally, districts are required to provide summer school programs for eligible ELLs.

Program content and design. As an integral part of the regular program, bilingual educational programs must be full-time, developmentally appropriate, academically challenging, and provide instruction in the home language and English. The amount of instruction in each language is “*commensurate with the students’ level of proficiency in each language and their level of academic achievement.*” ESL programs are “*designed to develop proficiency in the comprehension, speaking, reading, and composition in the English language.*” At the high school level, ESL programs must be consistent with graduation requirements. The amount of ESL instruction varies and is dependent on the students’ level of English proficiency. Some students may receive a full time program. Specially trained teachers in these English only instructional programs use sheltered second language pedagogical approaches in the various content areas. Both Bilingual and ESL programs (a) address children’s affective, linguistic, and cognitive needs by promoting the development of higher level thinking skills through culturally responsive instruction, (b) provide access to meaningful interactions with students in the regular program in subjects such as art, music, and physical education; and (c) require parental approval for participation.

Program Entry and Exit. Within four weeks of enrollment, students must be identified as ELLs and placed in appropriate language program. Each student takes a **Home Language Survey** to determine if the district is required to provide language program services. The survey, signed by the parent/caregiver, is kept in the student’s permanent record files. Language Proficiency Assessment Committees, which include school personnel and a parent of an ELL student who participates in a language program (a) classify students as ELLs, (b) determine students’ language proficiency and academic achievement level, (c) designate initial placement, recommend exit, and monitor academic progress of exited students, (d) determine appropriate State testing options, and (e) communicate with parents.

Staffing and Staff Development. According to established policy, districts must make effort to “*assign appropriately certified teachers to the required bilingual education and English as a second language programs.*” If this is not possible they can assign teachers with emergency

teaching and special assignments permits; or, they can apply for exceptions or waivers. Districts may use, minimally 10%, of their budget to provide in-service and pre-service professional development in bilingual education and ESL.

Program Evaluation. Districts are required to “conduct periodic assessment and continuous diagnosis in the languages of instruction to determine program impact and student outcomes in all subject areas.”

Conclusion

Data clearly shows that, for the most part, English Language Learners, while required to go to school, do not have automatic access to schooling opportunities available to native English speakers. Adequate language polices appear to be in place; however, a myriad of educational, political, and economic reasons impede equitable implementation. First, a cadre of well prepared, bilingual and ESL teachers is a basic need. Teacher preparation programs, traditional and alternative, need to prepare large numbers of culturally and linguistically competent teachers. It is also necessary to overcome the political, highly charged issues concerning educating ELLs in Texas. Sometimes ‘anti-immigration’ attitudes place the schooling concerns of second language learners as less important than other issues facing education. Economic issues show that many of the ELLs attend schools in high-poverty urban and rural settings, where resources, such as people, programs, relevant curricular materials, professional development training, are limited. The solution may come from the field — administrators and teachers taking the lead and making the commitment to seek programs and experiences that will prepare them to serve this student population equitably.

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