Project Summary/Abstract

Title: Reclassifying and Not Reclassifying English Learners as Fluent English Proficient: Access and Achievement

Topic: English Learners

Goal: Exploration

Purpose: Current challenges to English learner (EL) education in California include underachievement; low rates of reclassification to Fluent English Proficient (FEP); growing numbers of long-term and U.S.-born ELs; and inconsistent EL policies, programs, and practices. EL status ostensibly confers instructional support to develop English proficiency, while providing access to the core curricula, until ELs can function without such support. Either premature or delayed entry into the mainstream is potentially harmful. Reclassification can be a gateway to full participation in core curricula and greater opportunity to learn, which can in turn promote greater academic achievement. Yet an apparent discrepancy exists between the substantial percentage of ELs who meet minimum English proficiency and achievement criteria and the much smaller percentage that are reclassified as FEP. The purpose of this project is to document this discrepancy and begin to examine the potential impact on achievement outcomes of ELs’ reclassifying as FEP or remaining EL. Longitudinal investigation is needed to (1) document the apparent discrepancy by linking English proficiency, achievement, and reclassification data within districts; (2) identify factors that facilitate or prevent reclassification; (3) describe the consequences for access to core curricula of being reclassified and of not being reclassified; (4) examine the relation between reclassification and academic achievement; and (5) examine the reclassification and performance trajectories of different groups of EL students.

Setting: District 1 and District 2

Population: ELs in grades 2 through 8 at baseline. In 2008–09, District 2 had 25% ELs (6617 in grades 2 through 8); District 1 had 32% ELs (107,807 in grades 2 through 8).

Primary Research Method: Longitudinal data collection and quantitative cohort analysis of ELs in grades 2 through 8 at baseline and grades 6 through 12 at completion, using retrospective (1 year) and prospective (3 years) district student-level data on English proficiency, achievement, and reclassification status. Longitudinal data collection and qualitative and quantitative analysis of district-, school- (staff interviews), and student-level data (student reclassification decision forms, course taking for a subsample of selected cohorts, grades 3, 6, and 9).

Measures and Key Outcomes: Student demographics; California English Language Development Test; California State Test of English Language Arts (CST-ELA); EL Level; reclassification decision; student performance on reclassification criteria; CST-Math; credits earned; GPA; college-prep and AP course taking; California High School Exit Exam; high school completion; attendance; district and school staff interviews regarding EL classification, reclassification, instructional placement policies and practices, and core curricular access.

Data Analytic Strategy: We will use descriptive and correlational analysis as well as regression discontinuity design (RD) to explore the relation between reclassification and achievement outcomes, taking into account prior achievement and demographic characteristics, and conduct subgroup analyses as appropriate. We will also investigate whether access to the core mediates the effect of reclassification on achievement. An event history/survival analysis will examine the baseline factors that are related to students’ odds of being reclassified over a 4-year period. Analysis of quantitative and qualitative data triangulated across sources of data and informants will be used to describe EL district policies and procedures regarding reclassification, factors that facilitate and prevent reclassification, and access to the core.