Prospects: The Congressionally Mandated Study of Educational Growth and Opportunity

Language Minority and Limited English Proficient Students

1995

This report does not examine the impact of mode of instruction on student performance and progress; subsequent Prospects reports will examine student outcomes over time. No conclusions should be drawn about the effectiveness of particular instructional approaches in the education of limited-English proficient students based on the cross sectional data in this report.

Analysis and Highlights

Measured by grades, retention in grade, teacher judgements of student ability, and standardized tests, the academic performance of limited-English proficient (LEP) students generally lags behind other elementary school students. Eighty to 90 percent of LEP students receive some form of supplementary education from federal, state or local sources. However, 30 percent do not receive English as a second language or bilingual education from any source. In schools receiving Chapter 1 (now Title I) funding, about 1 out of 5 LEP 1st and 3rd graders with low performance in math or reading receive no supplemental instruction in those areas.

Nationally, children reared in a setting in which a language other than English is commonly used comprise about 16 percent of all students in the 1st and 3rd grades. Among these language minority students, about 40 percent are classified as LEP. While these students vary widely, many are particularly disadvantaged -- coming from very poor families and typically living in communities (mostly urban) with high concentrations of poverty. Often their parents have only limited proficiency in English and may rarely speak English at home, are more likely to be employed in low-income jobs, and have low levels of formal education relative to other students.

These and other findings are from Prospects, the first longitudinal study designed to measure the effects of Chapter 1 (now Title I) on limited-English proficient students. Although the study does not provide detailed data on the nature of bilingual education or English as a second language instruction received by these students, this Congressionally mandated study includes nationally representative data on students who were in the 1st, 3rd or 7th grade at the beginning of this 5-year study. It includes a supplemental sample of 1st and 3rd graders in schools with high concentrations of LEP students. Information is collected annually from students, parents, teachers, and principals. This interim report is based on data for 1st and 3rd graders in 1991-92. Subsequent Prospects reports will examine interim student outcomes over time.

Chapter 1 /Title I provides funds to school districts to provide supplemental instruction to low-achieving students in low-income schools. It is the largest single federal elementary education program. Instructional areas supported by Chapter 1 include reading, mathematics, language arts, English as a second language (ESL) and bilingual education. Congress made it clear in the 1994 reauthorization of Chapter 1/Title I that LEP students are eligible for Chapter 1 services.

Findings
**Language, Family and Economic Background:**

LEP students are a diverse and often poor population.

- While LEP students speak over a hundred languages, Spanish is spoken by more than 77 percent of these students. In low-income urban schools, the proportion of Spanish speakers rises to about 90 percent of LEP students.

- Most LEP students come from poverty backgrounds. Fifty-four percent of LEP students in 1st and 3rd grades are in families with incomes under $15,000--and the proportion rises to 66 percent in high-poverty schools. About 50 percent of Hispanic LEP 1st graders attend a high-poverty school--compared to 8 percent of Asian LEP 1st graders. Less than a 3rd of the parents of LEP students reported very good skills in speaking, reading or writing English. About 50 percent of mothers of LEP students do not have a high school diploma.

- LEP students are less likely than other students--including those from other low-income families--to have early childhood education. For example, 13 percent of LEP students participated in Head Start, compared to 27 percent of other language minority students. LEP students are also less likely to have attended kindergarten (80 percent of LEP students versus 96 percent of all 3rd grade students).

**Academic Performance:**

Measured by grades, retention in grade, teacher judgements of student ability, and standardized tests, the academic performance of limited-English proficient (LEP) students is lagging behind that of other elementary school students.

- LEP students did not perform as well as other 3rd grade students in English language standardized reading and math tests. Testing Spanish-speaking students in Spanish produced slightly better results. LEP students scored at the 30th percentile in reading and the 36th percentile in math. LEP students attending high-poverty schools scored even lower. Overall, 72 percent of LEP students were tested in English or Spanish; LEP students who spoke a language other than English or Spanish were not tested.

- Grades tell a similar story: in reading, 7 percent of all 3rd graders received a grade of unsatisfactory, compared to 16 percent of LEP students (and 19 percent of LEP students in high-poverty schools). In math, 8 percent of all 3rd graders received a grade of unsatisfactory, compared to 18 percent of LEP students (and 22 percent of LEP students in high-poverty schools).

- Teachers report a larger gap between LEP students and other students in academic ability and performance in the 3rd grade than they do in the 1st grade. This may indicate a growing gap in student performance as students advance through grade levels. Alternately, or in addition, since many 1st graders will no longer be LEP by the 3rd grade, it may reflect that harder to reach LEP children are found in the later grades. Or it may indicate that LEP students entering the school at the 3rd grade are further behind. Subsequent Prospects reports will use longitudinal data to address this issue.

- Nearly 1 out of 4 LEP students in schools with high concentrations of LEP students has repeated a grade by 3rd grade--compared to 15 percent of other students.
Schools:

LEP students are likely to attend schools with poor children.

- Schools with high concentrations of low-income students face increased challenges. More than 40 percent of LEP students attend high-poverty schools where at least 75 percent of the students are eligible for the free or reduced school lunch program--compared to 13 percent of all students. Over 74 percent of LEP students attend schools where at least half the students are eligible for the School lunch program--schools now eligible for Title I "schoolwide" programs.

Student Placement:

There is great variation in how schools identify LEP students.

- Almost all schools use multiple criteria for entry into and exit from language related services--and 85 percent of LEP students are in districts that use 4 or more criteria. Less than 3 percent are in schools that use a student's home language as sole criterion. More than 90 percent of LEP students are in schools that use a test of English oral/aural proficiency to determine entry and about 3 out of 4 schools require such tests for exit.

- Few LEP students (18 percent of 1st graders and 24 percent of 3rd graders) were tested in content areas in a non-English language.

- About 47 percent LEP students did not take a Prospects standardized test in either English or Spanish--and many students taking the test in Spanish were not listed as LEP in school records. These patterns pose important issues for effective assessment and its role in school accountability.

Teachers:

- Teachers of LEP students have job experience similar to other teachers at these grade levels--with an average of over 12 years in teaching, and over 6 years in the same school. Many teachers of LEP students lack specific training to teach children who are not proficient in English and a majority do not speak the students' native language.

- There is significant reliance on classroom aides to help teach LEP students, particularly in high poverty schools. Over 58 percent of LEP students in high-poverty schools have aides for English/reading instruction, compared to only 12 percent in low-poverty schools. Less than 21 percent of LEP students have aides who have some education beyond high school. In both grades, fewer than half of LEP students have aides who speak their language.

- About half of 1st grade LEP students have teachers who report that they are proficient in the predominant non-English language spoken by their students. This figure falls to 40 percent of LEP 3rd graders. LEP students in schools with lower poverty levels are much less likely to have teachers who can speak the student's native language.

If the child speaks a language other than English or Spanish, the teacher is even less likely to understand. Fewer than 15 percent of LEP students who speak a language other than English or
Spanish have teachers who report fluency in the child's language.

**Language of Instruction:**

English is the primary language of instruction for LEP students. Many LEP children in Chapter 1 do not receive content area instruction in their mother tongue.

- Less than 48 percent of LEP students have teachers who provide regular classroom instruction in content areas using a language other than English.

- Even in those classrooms where a language other than English is used for some part of instruction, about 40 percent of instruction for 1st graders and 50 percent of instruction for 3rd graders is in English. In high-LEP concentration schools, a much larger proportion of instruction is in a native language than in low concentration schools.

- In classrooms that utilize the child's native language, by the end of a single school year there is a dramatic shift away from primary use of the child's native language for instruction in content areas. By the end of a single school year, only 14 percent of LEP 3rd graders are in classrooms where instruction is primarily in the student's mother tongue.

**Instruction:**

The type and quality of instruction programs for LEP students varied, with many--including many in Chapter 1 schools--not receiving any special services at all.

- Over half of LEP students in both grades have classroom teachers who indicate that they teach ESL as part of their regular classroom. That does not necessarily mean that those teachers are trained or qualified to provide this instruction. While not all states require certification in second language acquisition, only about 15 percent of the LEP students in both grades are taught by regular classroom teachers who report having ESL certification. Similarly, only about 36 percent of 1st grade LEP students and 21 percent of 3rd grade LEP students have a regular classroom teacher certified to teach bilingual education. Teachers certified in bilingual education are far more likely to be teaching in high-poverty and/or high-LEP concentration schools. In these high-LEP concentration schools, just over half of the 1st grade LEP students have regular classroom teachers certified to teach bilingual education.

- Most teachers of LEP children do not use instructional materials specifically designed for LEP students. In reading, over 64 percent of LEP students have teachers who use the same materials for English proficient and LEP students. Over 79 percent of LEP students in both grades have math teachers who report using the same instructional materials with LEP and English proficient students for some part of their instruction.

- Between 80 and 90 percent of LEP students receive some form of supplementary education through federal, state or local programs. About 45 percent of 1st grade LEP students and more than 60 percent of 3rd grade LEP students participate in some form of education assistance in reading/language arts, primarily through the Chapter 1 program. Thirty percent of LEP students in both grades do not receive bilingual education or ESL from any source--largely because they attend schools that do not provide
such services.

- In core curricular areas, such as reading and mathematics, many low-performing LEP students are not receiving supplementary instruction beyond that in their bilingual-Education or English as a second language instruction. More than 40 percent of low-achieving LEP students in our nation's schools receive no supplemental (federal, state, or local) help in reading/language arts. Sixty-five percent of low-achieving LEP 1st graders do not participate in supplementary programs in math. Even in schools receiving Chapter 1/Title I funds, many LEP students with low academic achievement receive no supplemental services. For example, 18 percent of 1st graders with low achievement in mathematics receive no supplementary mathematics services; in reading the figure is 27 percent. For 3rd graders, 19 percent of LEP 3rd graders with low achievement in mathematics are receiving no supplemental mathematics services; in reading, the figure is 21 percent.

### Implications

Implications of these findings of lagging performance, with limited support for improving student outcomes, include the need for:

- High quality educational assessments for all students (including LEP students),
- Improved staff development--for both new and current teachers and aides--to effectively teach LEP students for higher achievement throughout the core curricula,
- Improved program coordination at state, local and school levels, and
- Better technical assistance (including to areas that serve relatively few LEP students).

Schoolwide projects under Title I and Title VII can help meet these needs. State and local education agencies' planning, application review, technical assistance, and other activities can play a vital role in this capacity building in our nation's schools. These issues of equal educational opportunities for all our nation's children are particularly important now as the reauthorized Chapter 1/Title I program is being implemented.

### Ordering Information

To obtain Prospects: The Congressionally Mandated Study of Educational Growth and Opportunity, Interim Report: Language Minority and Limited English Proficient Students, contact:

**Office of the Under Secretary**  
Planning and Evaluation Service  
U.S. Department of Education  
600 Independence Avenue, S.W., Rm. 4136  
Washington, D.C. 20202

Public use of Prospects data tapes can be obtained from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. The Prospects report and related publications may also be ordered from:

**The National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education**  
at George Washington University  
2121 K St NW, Suite 206  
Washington, D.C. 20037
Related Reports:

Related reports may be ordered from these sources. Reports include:

- *Descriptive Study of Services to LEP Students*
- *Providing Chapter 1 Services to Limited English Proficient Students*
- *Serving Different Masters: Title VII Evaluation Practice and Policy*
- *Bilingual Beginnings: Evaluation of the Preschool Special Populations Program*
- *Identifying Model Strategies in Bilingual Education: Parent Involvement*
- *New Land, New Knowledge: An Evaluation of two Education Programs Serving Refugee and Immigrant Students*
- *The Title VII Academic Excellence Program: Disseminating Effective Programs and Practices in Bilingual Education*