

Nevada’s English Language Learner Population: A Review of Enrollment, Outcomes, and Opportunities¹

Sonya Douglass Horsford, Ed.D., The Lincy Institute
Christina Mokhtar, Ph.D., Annenberg Institute for School Reform
Carrie Sampson, M.S., The Lincy Institute

March 2013

Nevada is outpacing the rest of the nation in population growth, immigration, and the increasing ethnic and linguistic diversity of its children and families. As a result, Nevada has increasing and high numbers of English Language Learners (ELLs) - students who speak a language other than English at home – and show low educational attainment compared to their native English-speaking peers. The complete report paints a picture of Nevada’s English Language Learner population and provides suggestions for improving their educational opportunities and outcomes. We provide here a list of selected findings from the report followed by state level policy recommendations.

The complete report is available at <http://www.unlv.edu/lincyinstitute/education>

Selected State and District Findings

- From 1998 to 2008, the number of ELLs in Nevada increased over 200 percent (Mokhtar, 2012).
- Nevada is home to the highest density of children (31 percent) who do not speak English as their first language (Migration Policy Institute, 2010).
- In 2010, one-third of Nevada’s children ages five to seventeen years spoke a language other than English at home – a 43 percent increase from the year 2000 (Mokhtar, 2012).
- In February 2013, CCSD identified 94,771 ELL students, with 53,073 actively enrolled in services (CCSD ELL Fast Facts, 2013).
- Eighty percent of CCSD’s ELL students are from the U.S. (CCSD ELL Fast Facts, 2013).
- Nevada does not have English Language Development (ELD) standards in place, requiring ELL students meet English Language Arts (ELA) standards despite limited proficiency in English (CCSD, ELL Programs, n.d.).
- In 2011, less than half (42 percent) of third-grade ELLs in CCSD met the standard in reading; only 10 percent of eighth-grade ELLs met the standard in reading (Mokhtar, 2012)
- Despite having the highest density of ELLs in the country (Migration Policy Institute, 2010), Nevada remains one of only eight states that do not fund ELL education (AIR, 2012).

¹ For a copy of the full report, including references, please visit <http://www.unlv.edu/lincyinstitute/education>

- The only monies Nevada schools receive to support ELL students are Title III federal funds, which are significantly less than what most states provide districts for ELL students (AIR, 2012).
- In CCSD, ELLs receive only \$119 in additional district level support per pupil compared to \$4,837 in Broward County Public Schools, FL, \$4,677 in Miami-Dade County Public Schools, FL, and \$2,588 in Houston Independent School District, TX.
- Although analyses of public school funding in Nevada have examined adequacy (2006) and equity (2012), the state has not conducted a costing out study focused specifically on how to meet the educational resource needs of its ELL population.

State-Level Policy Recommendations

- Develop a vision for ELL education in Nevada that is grounded in theory about second language acquisition and evidence-based practices in districts, schools, and classrooms.
- Use Gándara and Rumberger’s framework for defining an adequate ELL education.
- Develop English Language Development (ELD) standards that can be used by districts to support their ELD curriculum development, instruction, and professional development.
- Provide high quality early learning opportunities for Nevada’s ELL students.
- Require small class sizes in schools serving large ELL student populations.
- Require highly qualified teachers² in classrooms and schools serving large ELL student populations.
- Partner with higher education institutions to develop pre-service programs that produce bilingual, bicultural teachers
- Provide in-service professional development for all current teaches to teach ELL students at higher ELD level
- Provide a menu of evidence-based ELL program options for districts to implement
- Encourage districts to develop:
 - Professional collaborative time school-wide to tackle problems of practice as they relate to ELL students
 - Well defined programs for ELLs
 - Detailed and understandable information to parents and families about ELL program options, including dual language schools
 - Research that includes cohort analysis to understand the educational trajectories of ELL students at different grade spans
- Require districts to report 4-year cohort graduation rates and annual dropout rates for ELL students.
- Ensure ELL students are not further harmed educationally as a result of the elimination of social promotion policies.
- Commission a costing out study that focuses specifically on the resource needs of Nevada’s ELLs.
- Develop a weighted student funding formula that allocates additional funding to ELL students based on their English language development level and clearly defined educational goals and needs.
- Identify and allocate adequate state funds to the education of Nevada’s ELL students and other linguistic minorities

² NCLB coined the term “Highly qualified teacher.” Each state has the freedom to develop a definition of “highly qualified,” as long as it has these minimal requirements: bachelor’s degree; full state certification (no emergency certification) and licensure as defined by the state; and demonstrated competency, as defined by the state, in each core academic subject he or she teaches.