Practices, Structures, and Systems for Supporting Multilingual Learners in SFUSD

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This summary of research evidence finds five instructional practices, structures or policies related to multilingual students (otherwise known as "English Learners") that are associated with positively impacting teaching and learning. This summarizes research from 2010-2018 conducted between Stanford University and San Francisco Unified School District. In some cases, we explain changes that SFUSD has made as a result of the research evidence.

1. **SFUSD changed policies related to course placement of students labeled "English Learners" (ELs) because they found some practices of sorting students as ELs negatively impact students' access to courses. Some of the evidence they considered when making these decisions included:**
   a. Using SFUSD course-taking data from fall 2002 to spring 2012, this study found that middle school students still classified as ELs were both disproportionately in lower level classes and not enrolled in core academic classes, particularly English Language Arts (ELA). Researchers found that: 1) ELs were enrolled in one-ninth the number of honors credits, compared to English-Only students (EOs); 2) 42% of ELs compared to one to two percent of non-ELs were not enrolled in ELA in a given semester; and 3) overall, 95% of non-ELs were enrolled in math, science, and ELA in a given semester compared to 53% percent of ELs (Umansky, 2016a).

The researchers exploratory analysis suggested that this disproportionality is correlated with multiple factors, including: 1) prior academic achievement; 2) English proficiency level and EL classification as teacher/administrators can confound academic ability and English proficiency; and 3) institutional factors, most notably attendance in an under-resourced school that offers few highly academically tracked classes (Umansky, 2016b).

b. A study analyzing SFUSD high school students graduating between 2009 through 2016 found that high school course taking varies, both between ELs and Never-ELs and among EL subgroups. Overall, high school ELs (excluding reclassified students) are less likely to take advanced math, science, and world language courses compared to other groups. Newcomers and Long-Term ELs have different course-taking patterns; reclassified ELs take the same number of, if not more, academic classes than Never-ELs. The researchers also found that what happens to ELs in middle school makes a difference to their high school course-taking patterns. (Johnson, 2019a)

2. **Over time, compared to English immersion programs, bilingual programs demonstrated faster reclassification and student achievement for multilingual learners. While the difference was more significant for Latinx students than it was for Chinese students, the achievement gap between these two student groups remained wide with Chinese students outperforming Latinx students in all programs.**

a. Using SFUSD administrative data from fall 2000 through spring 2012, this study followed nine cohorts of Latino EL students. Researchers found that Latino ELs enrolled in two-language programs were reclassified at a slower pace in elementary school. However, they had higher overall reclassification rates, academic ELA achievement and English reading, writing, speaking, and listening proficiency by the end of high school. Specifically, we find that in this district it takes eight years in school for 50% of Latino ELs to be reclassified into mainstream status. A full 60% of Latino ELs become long-term ELs and roughly a quarter are never reclassified. (Umansky and Reardon, 2014)

b. Similarly, in a study following 750 EL students who entered SFUSD in kindergarten between the 2001-2002 and 2009-2010 academic years, researchers found that through second grade, ELs in dual immersion programs score lower in ELA than students in other language programs. However, by seventh grade, students in dual immersion and transitional bilingual programs score higher in ELA than those in English immersion classrooms. This held true for Latino students, with Chinese students exhibiting different patterns. The results did not vary by the language proficiency of the student when they started kindergarten. (Valentino and Reardon, 2015)

3. **Professional development focused on conversation, interactive supports, and social interaction can advance teacher skill in instructing ELs and influence student practices and achievement. In addition, teacher learning is accelerated when instruction happens collaboratively within grade-level or content-level teams**

a. When teachers applied a conversation-based approach for ELs, students engaged in academic conversations and initiated conversation related to learning objectives. Integrating English Language Development and Content Area Learning: A Conversation-Based Approach and the use of the Conversation Analysis Tool (CAT) to analyze student conversation is an online professional development initiative initiated in SFUSD in 2016. In addition to the findings related to students, researchers found that the teachers may benefit from opportunities to collaborate with peers in the process of planning for conversation and analyzing student conversations. (Zwiers & Bergey, 2016)

b. Interactive supports (i.e., oral feedback, rephrasing in academic language) appeared to be more crucial than pre-planned supportive structures (i.e., vocabulary lists, graphic organizers) for English Language Development for middle school students. This study analyzed sixty reading lessons used by six SFUSD middle school EL teachers nominated as exemplary during the 2014-15 school year. Teachers who expressed the most confidence in their ability to provide high challenge and high support instruction to ELs attributed their success to positive experiences in professional development that focused directly on reading instruction for ELs. These teachers also expressed interest in more resources on how to offer interactive, in-the-moment support to EL students. (Johnson, 2016)

c. Teachers can support EL students' knowledge of science content and language by supporting their social participation in the classroom. This study analyzed aspects of the SFUSD middle-school science curricula and observed four middle-school teachers and their students. Researchers recommend that a rigorous science curriculum for middle-school ELs explicitly focus on social interaction and that teacher professional development is aligned with this aspect of the curriculum. The researchers also highlight the importance of time and resources for teachers to change their practices related to teacher-student interactions and supporting student interactions in the classroom. (Solano-Flores, G. 2017)

4. **Summer programs for recently arrived high school students had positive impacts on participants. EL Village is a summer program that offers students who have recently arrived in the U.S. an opportunity to earn high school credits while helping develop academic and language skills. This study analyzed SFUSD data for the students in the 2009 through 2016 graduating classes. Researchers found that EL Village led to an increase in the number of ELA classes by .6 and raised five-year graduation rates by five percentage points. The findings also suggested that EL Village helped students raise their CELDT speaking scores and ELA achievement and reduce approximately five unexcused absences. (Johnson, 2019b)**

5. **Multiple modes of media could be important language development tools for young children of Latino immigrant families. A case study of seven Latino immigrant families with young children found that families made use of a wide range of media (i.e.TV, YouTube, Google translate, iPads) to promote language learning and language-rich plan; to create connections between home and school; and for reading and producing stories. (Levison, 2015)**

Citations

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