

K-12 Education in the Post Proposition 227 Era

In recent years, California voters and legislators—often acting from an uninformed, “common sense” perspective about teaching and learning—have enacted initiatives and legislation that have created unprecedented implementation challenges in K-12 public schools. Proposition 227, the *English Language Education for Children in Public Schools* initiative,¹ passed by a majority of California voters, has had a profound impact on English learners (ELs). The intent of this initiative was to eliminate bilingual education programs and to limit to one year the amount of time ELs could receive specialized instruction in English as a Second Language, also known as English Language Development (ELD).

Prior to its passage, educators grappled with what the regulations from Proposition 227 would mean in actual school settings and within the context of existing federal and state regulations requiring schools to ensure that ELs become proficient in English² and learn the academic core curriculum.³ The theme section of this issue of *The CATESOL Journal* is dedicated to the impact that Proposition 227 and several other far-reaching policy changes have had on the education of ELs.

Proposition 227 is not the only recent educational initiative impacting ELs. Other relevant initiatives include the implementation of class-size reduction for grades K-3,⁴ the elimination of social promotion coupled with intervention and retention policies,⁵ and the creation of the Academic Performance Index,⁶ an accountability system that ranks schools on the basis of student performance.⁷ These new policies, systems, and mandates represent a concern about education that is welcome; however, their implementation has presented school districts and educators across California with difficult, at times insurmountable challenges. Reducing K-3 classrooms to twenty students over the summer of 1998 left districts scrambling to find available teachers and sufficient empty rooms. Many districts, partic-

ularly those serving high poverty communities and language diverse populations, are still struggling to find sufficient teachers and to train and support the high numbers of beginning teachers, many of whom have not completed a teacher education program and are teaching on emergency credentials.

Clearly, the new promotion and retention policies will only be as successful as they are thoughtful. Many questions remain. What kinds of assessments will determine whether students have met grade-level standards? Will the assessments allow ELs to demonstrate what they know and can do, and not just whether they understand directions written in English? Will the interventions truly represent alternative instructional practices in the classroom? Will extended learning reflect a focus on the needs of individual students or simply a longer school day and a longer school year filled with the same instructional practices? In this era of accountability, will the new system of ranking schools expand to include measures that are performance-based, i.e., measures that demonstrate what ELs and all children know and can do?

Our theme authors address concerns that educators across California share. What has happened in school districts and classrooms as the mandates from Proposition 227 were implemented? In her article, Sara Fields discusses the various components of Proposition 227 and how various districts have responded to the mandates. While she reports on many difficulties confronted by districts, she also finds some positive outcomes and hope for the future as school districts and communities continue to grapple with the meaning of Proposition 227 and its impact on their educational programs.

The current climate of accountability and Proposition 227's focus on learning English rapidly led to state legislation in 1997⁸ for the development of a standards-based ELD assessment instrument for ELs. Natalie Kuhlman and Adel Nadeau describe the development of the ELD Standards, the specifics of the ELD Standards themselves (California Department of Education, 1999),⁹ and the pathways that the ELD Standards provide to the English Language Arts Standards (California Department of Education, 1998).¹⁰ The adoption of these ELD Standards by the California State School Board of Education represents a positive step in the recognition and understanding of the distinct experience ELs have in school as they both learn English and learn in English.

In the final article, Linda Sasser shares the professional development model created in her district for new teachers of ELs. This staff development model was created in response to program changes resulting from Proposition 227 and spurred by the presence of many new teachers with no training in ELD due to the hiring for class size reduction. With its detailed descriptions of each training module, the model will be useful to those plan-

ning staff development for new teachers of ELs as well as to educators in the classroom who are looking for ways to prepare ELs for the transition to the phonics-based literacy materials being used in mainstream classrooms.

These theme section authors address hopeful practices and outcomes as well as challenges facing educators and students as a result of Proposition 227.

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Endnotes

- ¹ This initiative, passed on June 2, 1998, mandates that children in K-12 who are ELs be taught primarily in English, except under certain waiver situations. The proposition, intended to end bilingual education in California, states that a sheltered English immersion model will be used so that English learners “acquire a good working knowledge of English” in a period “not normally intended to exceed one year” (Unz & Tuchman, 1997). After one year, students transition into a general education classroom.
- ² The Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA) of 1974 states: “[no] State shall deny equal educational opportunity to an individual on account of his or her race, color, sex or national origin by...the failure by an educational agency to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede the equal participation by its students in its instructional programs” (20 U.S.C. § 1703(f)).
- ³ The California State Department of Education *Coordinated Compliance Review Training Guide* states that in K-12 public education programs “... English learners are to develop fluency in English and proficiency in the district’s core curriculum as rapidly as possible in an established English-language classroom or in an alternative course of study with curriculum designed for such students....English learners are redesignated fluent English proficient after meeting district criteria established to ensure that

these students have overcome language barriers, have recouped any academic deficits incurred in other areas of the curriculum, and can demonstrate English-language proficiency comparable to that of the school district's average native English-language speakers." For more information, see <http://www.cde.ca.gov/cdepress/>.

⁴ S.B. 1777 established a limit of twenty students in grades K-3 in order to improve student achievement in reading. By reducing class size from between 30 and 36 students to only 20, thousands of teaching positions were created and districts struggled to fill the openings. Many of those hired had not yet completed or even started their teacher education program and were hired under an emergency credential. For more information, see http://www.cde.ca.gov/classsize/legis/sb_1777.htm.

⁵ A.B. 1626 requires that California K-12 school districts establish policies for retaining students at second through eighth grades who do not meet minimum performance levels on grade level standards. The policy must include opportunities for interventions other than retention and for remedial instruction. For more information, see <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ppr/ii.htm>.

⁶ The Academic Performance Index (API), part of the Education Accountability Act, ranks schools on the basis of their students' academic performance, as demonstrated on the norm-referenced, standardized achievement test, the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT-9)(1996). Schools are held accountable for student achievement and are rewarded or penalized based on their API rank. For more information, see: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/psaa/api/frame/frame.htm>.

⁷ The SAT-9 is currently used in California for determining academic achievement of all students, including ELs.

⁸ A.B. 748, also known as the Escutia Bill, set the stage for standards-based assessment in all four skill areas for K-12 students whose primary language is other than English.

⁹ The ELD Standards delineate the knowledge, skills, and strategies in ELD that ELs need as a pathway to the English Language Arts Standards for K-12. These standards, which integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing, create a foundation for reading in English rather than delaying the introduction of this skill. They will form the basis for the development of a statewide test designed to measure English language proficiency.

For more information, see: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/cilbranch/sca/eld/eld.html/>.

¹⁰ The English Language Arts Standards specify the knowledge, skills, and strategies in language arts (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) that K-12 students should master or be proficient in at the end of a specific grade level. They are the basis for a supplementary test that is used in addition to the SAT-9.

References

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