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## Seeking Effective Policies and Practices for English Language Learners



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The Rennie Center's mission is to develop a public agenda that informs and promotes significant improvement of public education in Massachusetts. Our work is motivated by a vision of an education system that creates the opportunity to educate every child to be successful in life, citizenship, employment and life-long learning. Applying non-partisan, independent research, journalism and civic engagement, the Rennie Center is creating a civil space to foster thoughtful public discourse to inform and shape effective policy. For more information about the Rennie Center and our current work, visit [www.renniecenter.org](http://www.renniecenter.org), or call 617.354.0002.

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# SEEKING EFFECTIVE POLICIES AND PRACTICES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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## INTRODUCTION

The education of English language learners (ELLs)<sup>1</sup> is a challenge for teachers as well as for policymakers. In Massachusetts, as the population of ELLs has grown, attention to the question of how to best serve them has correspondingly intensified. Fifteen percent of students in Massachusetts report that their first language is not English (see Table 1). Moreover, educating ELLs has moved from being a concern in a small number of urban districts to a defining issue that touches most cities and towns in the Commonwealth. Ten years ago, only slightly more than half of school districts in the state enrolled ELLs. Today that proportion has soared to almost three-quarters of all districts. The number of districts enrolling one hundred or more ELLs has risen 37% in a decade.<sup>2</sup>

The tremendous diversity among ELLs adds complexity to the task of instituting policies and practices to meet the needs of every student. One hundred twelve different languages are represented in classrooms across the state, though the native language of the clear majority (54.6%) is Spanish. Further, *English Language Learner* (ELL) and *Limited English Proficient* (LEP) are broad designations that capture students matriculating into United States schools with widely varying backgrounds—from the first grader entering the system with bilingual parents and strong pre-literacy skills to the tenth grader entering the system with little formal education, even in her native language.

While English language learners comprise a growing proportion of the school-aged population, their achievement continues to lag behind that of their native English speaking peers on virtually all measures. On MCAS,<sup>3</sup> the scores of ELLs are below median student scores at every grade level and in every subject. (See Appendix A.) ELLs are 57% less likely than their native English-speaking counterparts to earn the competency determination needed to graduate from high school (94% vs. 60% for the class of 2007). Both the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 and the federal No Child Left Behind Act require schools to ensure that ELLs meet the same performance standards as their native English-speak-

ing peers. That we are so woefully far from that goal should be cause for alarm and for action.

In November 2002, Massachusetts voters approved a ballot initiative mandating English immersion as the primary means of instruction for most ELL students, making the state the third in the nation to pass such legislation.<sup>4</sup> The initiative spurred a period of policy development and refinement in the domain of educating English language learners. Still, many districts are struggling with implementation. Overall, it is unclear whether and how practice has changed at the classroom level.

Table 1. Growth of ELL Population 1996-97 through 2006-07

	2006-07		1996-97	
	N	%	N	%
FLNE <sup>5</sup> students	143,952	14.9%	118,375	12.7%
ELLs	54,071	5.6%	44,394	4.7%
Districts <sup>6</sup> with FLNE students	346	89.9%	299	84.9%
Districts with ELLs	285	73.2%	192	54.5%
Districts with 100+ ELLs	56	14.4%	41	11.6%

N = number in Massachusetts  
% = proportion of statewide population

This report examines the evolution of the policies and practices affecting ELLs over the past five years. It analyzes the state role in promoting improved practice and profiles three schools that are making significant strides with large populations of ELLs.

The report is organized into four sections:

- Massachusetts ELL Policy 2002-2007
- Profiles of Three Schools Making Strides with English Language Learners (including a description of the school selection process)
- Themes Across the Cases
- Next Steps for Policy and Practice

## MASSACHUSETTS ELL POLICY 2002-2007

In the nearly five years since ballot Question 2 made Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) the default instructional approach for all English language learners in the Commonwealth, significant changes have taken place in the way students are classified, teachers are trained, and accountability is structured. Many schools are making laudable efforts to improve practice and expand services for ELLs. The state Department of Education has played a key role in interpreting the new law and providing guidance to schools for their work with ELLs. A brief review of the law and the process of policy definition at the state level provides important context for understanding how schools are responding to the challenge of helping all ELLs achieve at high levels.

Question 2 reflected the concern of many citizens that English language learners were not learning English and being transitioned into mainstream classes quickly enough. Voters overwhelmingly endorsed the initiative by a 70-30 margin. It forced an explicit move away from Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) programs, which some perceived to rely too heavily on instruction in the student's native language while not focusing enough on integrating non-native English speakers with their English-speaking peers. By contrast, the 2002 law specifies a focus on instruction in English and encourages an expedited transition into a mainstream classroom. Its key language is as follows:

*...All children in Massachusetts public schools shall be taught English by being taught in English and all children shall be placed in English language classrooms. Children who are English learners shall be educated through sheltered English immersion during a temporary transition period not normally intended to exceed one school year.... (G.L. c. 71A: Section 4)*

The Legislature amended and further defined the terms of the new law in July, 2003. However, neither the original language of Question 2 nor its subsequent amendments offered enough specificity for schools looking to

adjust their programs to comply with the law. Thus, the Department of Education was responsible for interpreting key provisions of the law, including:

- Defining the substance of a Sheltered English Immersion program;
- Creating assessments that would annually measure English proficiency;
- Clarifying criteria to be used in transitioning students to mainstream classes; and
- Training teachers to meet the requirements of the new law.

The DOE has created tools and offered guidance in an effort to fill the gap between the generality of the policy mandated by Question 2 and the need for specificity at the classroom level in schools. Yet, ambiguity about how to best serve ELLs under the law persists in many districts across the Commonwealth.

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### Defining Sheltered English Immersion

Sheltered English Immersion is a concept that lacked definition in 2002. While the law made clear that students were to have English as their primary language of instruction, it was silent on the topics of pedagogy and practice—that is, how teachers were to advance English language acquisition. SEI is an approach to teaching academic content to ELLs; it does not refer to an existing curriculum or specific content area.

The question of how to create a Sheltered English Immersion program was further complicated by the fact that the new law dramatically increased the number of schools responsible for providing a formal, codified program to ELLs. Prior to 2002, state law required that only districts enrolling 20 or more students who spoke the same first language establish a program of Transitional Bilingual Education. Question 2 extended accountability to all districts with one or more ELLs. Suddenly hundreds of schools that had handled students on a case-by-case basis needed to follow state-defined rules.<sup>7</sup>



The Department of Education, working with districts and schools across the state, has come to operationalize SEI as follows:

**Sheltered English Immersion has two components:**

1. Sheltered content instruction, and
2. English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction.

**Sheltered content** instruction is instruction that includes approaches, strategies and methodology that make the content of the lesson more comprehensible to students who are not yet proficient in English. Although it is designed for ELLs who have an intermediate level of proficiency in English, ELLs with less than an intermediate level of proficiency can benefit from sheltered content instruction. Sheltered content classes are characterized by active engagement by ELLs. Such classrooms are characterized by lesson plans that include language objectives which address the linguistic requirements of the content to be taught (e.g. content vocabulary) and content objectives based on standards from the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

**English as a Second Language (ESL)** instruction is explicit, direct instruction about the English language intended to promote English language acquisition by ELL students and to help them “catch up” to their student peers who are proficient in English. It includes learning outcomes in speaking, listening comprehension, reading and writing. ESL instruction is a required part of an academic program for ELL students. ESL instruction should be based on an ESL curriculum and appropriate ESL textbooks and other materials. In effective ESL classrooms, learning takes place when there is sustained verbal interaction, often in small groups, as the students complete carefully designed academic tasks that include speaking, listening, reading and writing. Effective ESL instruction is often characterized by the use of thematic units, project-based instruction, and language instruction closely aligned with grade-appropriate content standards. Students should receive between 1 and 2.5 hours of ESL instruction per day, depending on proficiency level.<sup>8</sup>

This guidance still leaves room for schools to offer services to students in a variety of ways. Therefore, the question of what SEI looks like when done well remains. The case studies that appear later in this report demonstrate how three schools have taken this guidance and designed their programs to reflect its principles.

## Training Teachers

The statewide shift in expectations about how ELLs are to be educated has necessitated a focus on training teachers to meet these expectations. The size of the population in need of training is enlarged because many schools were entering the arena of English language education for the first time. The DOE has identified four categories of skills needed to effectively shelter content instruction and built teacher training modules around each category.

### *Sheltered Content Instruction*

- Category 1: Second Language Learning and Teaching
- Category 2: Sheltering Content Instruction
- Category 3: Assessing Speaking and Listening
- Category 4: Reading and Writing in the Sheltered Content Classroom

Each category requires ten hours or more of professional development for a total of approximately 75 hours. Hundreds of teachers have been trained, but the total number of teachers trained to date meets only a fraction of the statewide need (see Table 2).

### *ESL Instruction*

Further, because ESL instruction is a component of educating an ELL student, additional trained ESL teachers are needed. As the ELL population grows, the state must maintain a steep trajectory of training teachers in SEI practices. It is important to note that the state does not require districts to employ a particu-

Table 2: Statewide Teacher Training Needed

Skill	Estimated Need	Trained to Date	Remaining Need
Sheltered Content Instruction	~7,000 teachers	~2,500 teachers	~4,500 teachers
English as a Second Language	~1,300 teachers	860 teachers licensed	~440 teachers

lar number of teachers trained in either SEI or ESL.<sup>9</sup> Determining the number of trained teachers needed in a system remains at the discretion of districts.

### Creating Assessments

Question 2 and the federal No Child Left Behind Act, passed within a year of one another, reinforce each other in terms of mandating that schools and districts are held accountable for the annual progress of their ELLs. In response to these accountability requirements, the state has developed two assessments, tailored for students at different grade levels. They are:

- The **Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment-R/W (MEPA-R/W)** which measures ELL students’ reading and writing skills.
- The **Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment-O (MELA-O)** which measures ELL students’ listening and speaking skills.

The results of these two assessments are combined to produce a scaled score and an English language performance level for each ELL assessed. As such, these tests are a key piece of data used in the complicated and sometimes controversial process of transitioning students into mainstream English classes.

### Transitioning Students

Question 2 directly addressed the concern that ELLs were remaining in transitional bilingual programs for too long. It specified that students were expected to move to mainstream classes after a “period not normally intended to exceed one school year.” However, federal Civil Rights legislation supersedes this state provision. The Supreme Court ruled, in *Lau vs. Nichols*, that placing a student in a mainstream English class before she is able to “participate meaningfully” violates Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.<sup>10</sup> Further, the state language is incompatible with the terms of the federal Equal Educational Opportunities Act. Thus, students cannot be moved into mainstream English classes simply because their first year in a US classroom has expired.

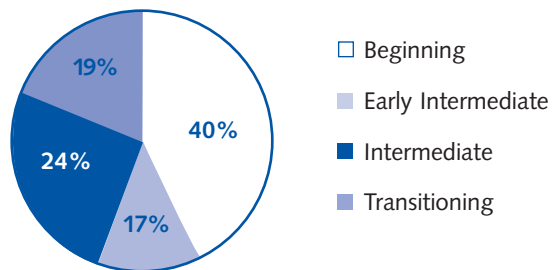
The MEPA exam offers a standards-based method of determining when students are ready to “meaningfully participate” in mainstream classes. Students earn scores that are categorized along the following continuum:

- Beginning (Levels 1 and 2)
- Early Intermediate (Levels 3 and 4)
- Intermediate (Levels 5 and 6)
- Transitioning (Level 7)

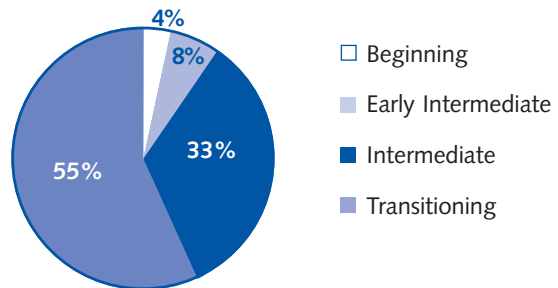
Students scoring at the highest level on the MEPA are likely to possess a level of English proficiency sufficient to be transitioned out of LEP status, as the category name suggests.<sup>11</sup>

After one year in Massachusetts schools, the vast majority of ELLs are not scoring in the transitioning range. Of all first-year ELLs entering grades three through twelve, less than one-fifth attained that standard on the 2006 MEPA. (For disaggregated data by grade level, see Appendix B). A much greater percentage – almost two-fifths – scored at the other end of the spectrum, in the beginning range.

2006 MEPA Steps: One Year in MA Public School



2006 MEPA Steps: Five+ Years in MA Public School



Among ELLs with five or more years in the system, more than half score at the *transitioning* level. Yet, that leaves a large portion of students who have spent considerable time in US schools without acquiring basic proficiency in the English language.

Further, scoring in the *transitioning* range is not grounds for automatic re-classification into mainstream classes. A recent analysis by the Department of Education revealed wide variation among districts with respect to the correlation between a score of *transitioning* on MEPA and the actual act of being re-classified by the school. While some districts moved 100% of

students that scored *transitioning* out of ELL status, other districts re-classified as few as 16% of *transitioning* students. The median for all districts was re-classification of roughly half of *transitioning* students. The process of re-classifying students continues to be an area of uncertainty for educators, many of whom voice concern that former ELLs will not get the instruction and support they need once they have been re-classified. The case study schools profiled in the next section offer ideas for districts struggling with how to structure the re-classification process.

## PROFILES OF THREE SCHOOLS MAKING STRIDES WITH ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Case study research encompassed three schools representing elementary, middle and high school:

- Brockton High School, Brockton
- Fuller Middle School, Framingham
- Beebe Elementary School, Malden

### School Selection and Research

The schools profiled in this report are having success with large populations of ELLs and, consequently, have lessons and innovations to share with other districts and schools. They were selected based on consistently high levels of performance across a series of indicators. Researchers completed a systematic, statewide review to identify districts and schools making exceptional progress with large concentrations of students whose first language is not English. Districts were first sorted by size of the ELL population and income level. Districts with fewer than 100 students classified as limited English proficient and districts with fewer than 25% low-income students were excluded from consideration.

In the second stage of the review, we examined the performance of eligible districts in terms of Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs) established by the Massachusetts Department of Education to ensure district progress in compliance with the federal No Child Left Behind Act. AMAOs evaluate district achievement in three categories:

- Percent of students making progress toward English language proficiency on the MEPA exam;
- Percent of students attaining English language proficiency on the MEPA; and
- Percent of ELLs making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in English language arts and math on MCAS.

Districts that did not meet at least two of three AMAO targets were removed from consideration. Finally, we examined school-level performance both by grade

### Glossary of Terms

**Bilingual Education:** Bilingual education refers to a language acquisition process for students in which all or substantial portions of the instruction, textbooks, or teaching materials are in the child's native language, other than English. (See text box on page 7 for more information.)

**English Language Learner (ELL):** A student whose first language is a language other than English and who is unable to perform ordinary classroom work in English.

**English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes (ELPBO):** Guidance developed by the Massachusetts DOE for schools serving English language learners.

**First Language Not English (FLNE):** A student whose native language is a language other than English.

**Formerly Limited English Proficient (FLEP):** A student who was formerly limited English proficient and has transitioned out of LEP status during the current school year or within the past two school years. The federal government requires that states continue to monitor the progress of FLEP students.

**Limited English Proficient (LEP):** A student whose first language is a language other than English and who is unable to perform ordinary classroom work in English.

**Sheltered English Immersion (SEI):** Grade-level subject matter and English language instruction modified to be comprehensible to and permit participation by the ELL students in the classroom at their level of English language proficiency. All instruction and materials are in English.

**Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP):** Model for sheltering content instruction to English language learners.

**Two-Way Bilingual Program:** A bilingual program in which students develop language proficiency in two languages by receiving instruction in English and another language.

level and by ELL students' number of years in the United States system (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5+). Case study schools all exceeded their state-established targets for student progress toward English proficiency and they topped the progress of all other schools serving their grade-range for at least one category of students (e.g. students in their first year in the U.S. *or* students with more than five years in the U.S.).

Table 3: Case Study Selection Criteria

Indicator	Baseline Criteria for Inclusion
Size of ELL population	100 students
Poverty rate (%)	25%
Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives	2 of 3 objectives met
School-level % making progress	Exceeds target; exceeds similar schools

### Capital B Bilingual vs. Small b bilingual

Some may be surprised to find the word bilingual in this report, because Bilingual Education is believed to have been eliminated with the passage of Question 2. The political importance of the word bilingual when referring to Bilingual Education stems from its place at the center of the emotional debate over Question 2 in Massachusetts and a broader, related debate over immigration and English as our national language at the federal level. For the purposes of differentiation, we refer to formal Bilingual Education programs\* as *Bilingual* with a capital "B."

The other important point to be made regarding the use of the word *bilingual* in this report is that in addition to its meaning regarding (capital "B") Bilingual Education, it is also commonly used among educators to describe students who function in more than one language. For the purpose of differentiation, we refer to small "b" *bilingual* as a term used to characterize those learning English who are fluent in another language.

The term (small b) *bilingual* is used by educators for several reasons:

- It is a more affirmative term than Limited English Proficient (LEP), which defines students only in terms of their deficits in the English language.
- It is more fully descriptive of students than the more current label of English language learners (ELLs), which identifies students based only on their efforts relative to learning English, without valuing the language(s) they already know.
- Students and families are generally less familiar with acronyms and their meanings, than with the term *bilingual*, because it is an actual word found in the dictionary.

The case studies use the term *bilingual* (in both forms), employing one or the other to most accurately describe a school's approach.

\*Passage of Question 2 seemed on its face to spell the end for formal Bilingual Education, defined as classes in which academic content instruction is carried out by teachers in the native language of the student group. It is important to note, however, that the law does not absolutely outlaw the use of ELL students' native language in school. Languages other than English can be used:

- Among students to clarify content;
- By teachers of ELL students in oral responses to students' questions, so as to clarify concepts taught in English; and
- If a student is in a two-way Bilingual program.

However, except in the case of a two-way Bilingual program, academic materials and assessments must be in English.

Parents of ELL students who want their children educated in the native language can still prevail by submitting a waiver. If parents of at least 20 students of the same native language complete waivers requesting Bilingual Education, the school district must provide it. Thus, Bilingual Education legally exists in Massachusetts under these circumstances. Indeed, in this study, parental waivers in two of the case study schools resulted in Bilingual academic content classes being offered as an instructional option for some ELLs. These Bilingual programs focus instruction and materials on moving students toward instruction in English in SEI content classes and ultimately in mainstream content classes. Due to fine-tuned assessment and placement in these schools, a student may be in a Bilingual class for one content area and in SEI classes or mainstream classes for other content areas.

Field research for the cases included interviews with superintendents, district ELL coordinators, principals and coaches, as well as focus groups with teachers and parents. In addition, researchers conducted classroom observations and reviewed artifacts documenting the schools' approaches to ELLs.

Each case study examines the following topics:

- Structure of the program;
- Educating English language learners;
- The transition process;
- Staffing and professional development; and
- Supports for English language learners.

The case studies conclude with an analysis of cross-cutting themes that emerged.

## Brockton High School – Brockton, MA

Brockton High is a large academic complex housing 4,328 students in nine buildings that stretch approximately one third of a mile in length. Susan Szackowicz, the principal of Brockton High, points out that the city of Brockton has traditionally been seen as a hardscrabble city, of immigrants and factories, with a legacy of struggles. Yet, it is precisely this image that motivates her and the Brockton High staff to defy the odds and, through innovation and hard work, spur all students to high achievement. “The Brockton Spirit” recognizes that the city’s heritage is connected to the struggles of today’s immigrants.

### Structure of the Program

Brockton High School educates an ethnically-mixed student body. The first language of 31.9% of students at Brockton High School is a language other than English. Their program for ELLs, directed by Anna Carreiro, offers three carefully monitored routes to educational advancement:

- The Transitional Bilingual Education strand;
- The Immersion strand; and
- The Literacy strand.

All strands include ESL classes. The program serves 414 ELL students in all, including 65% in the TBE strand, 31% in the Immersion strand, and 4% in the Literacy strand. The Program also offers an MCAS preparation class for ELLs. Among the ELLs utilizing services of the Bilingual program, 64% speak Cape Verdean (Kriolo), 18% speak Haitian (Creole), 11% speak Spanish, 5% speak Portuguese, and 2% speak one of a variety of other languages.

ELLs typically progress through the program by spending one to two years in the TBE strand, and then one year in the Immersion strand. Students then enter mainstream classes either in all content area classes at

once or on a staggered entry timetable, trying one or two mainstream classes in conjunction with Immersion strand content courses.

### Educating English Language Learners

Upon their arrival at Brockton High, Ms. Carreiro meets with ELLs and their families in order to establish a relationship, to listen to what parents want to tell her, to respond to questions and concerns and to put everyone at ease. She is the family’s first contact and feels it is important that their first experience is a congenial one. Parents have the final say over the placement of their children in one of the three program strands.

Student Progress on MEPA: Brockton High School		
Years in MA	N	% Making Progress
1	79	46%
2	115	79%
3	71	76%
4	40	65%
5+	55	60%
<b>Overall Progress Rate</b>		<b>65%</b>

Students in the **Transitional Bilingual Education** strand attend native language classes (Spanish, Cape Verdean or Haitian) in the content areas of math, social studies, and science, as well as two ESL support classes. Teachers use the native language as needed and often use English and the native language interchangeably. Texts and instructional materials are in English only. Classes meet on a modified block schedule of 66 minutes each for five blocks per day.

Students in the **Immersion** strand are placed in:

- General education classrooms for the content areas of math, social studies and science; or
- Classrooms in which the content is “sheltered” using SEI methods; or
- A combination of both.

Demographic Information: Brockton High School									
White	Hispanic	African -American	Asian	Multi-Race Non-Hispanic	Free and Reduced Lunch	Total Number of Students in Program	Total Number of Student Languages	Percent ELL	Percent FLNE
29.9%	2.8%	52.7%	2.8%	2.2%	61.8%	Gr. 9-12, 414	20	10.8%	31.9%

Placement is based on students' level of proficiency in English. Additionally, students in this strand take more advanced ESL instruction than those in the Bilingual strand. Some native language is used in the content courses in this strand as well to clarify complex concepts. These classes also follow the modified block schedule.

Teachers of content courses in the Immersion strand make aspects of the English language explicit in class using SEI methods. This includes posting the daily language objectives alongside the daily content objectives, building vocabulary, analyzing words and asking students to repeat key words aloud. Teachers create graphic organizers to structure content-related language (e.g., timelines, cause-and-effect charts, Venn diagrams to organize comparisons) as a step in scaffolding essay writing. They also teach students language-based skills that can be used in other classes such as two-column note-taking, making content "comprehensible" by simplifying structures and vocabulary (vs. simplifying the concepts of the content) and sharing their own strategies as second language learners with their students (e.g., studying content-related vocabulary more efficiently by first identifying and looking up one key word in the definition, which might spark recognition of the vocabulary word.) (See Appendix C for additional detail.)

Newly arrived students with interrupted formal schooling (SWIFS) whose reading ability is profoundly below grade level for their age attend the **Literacy** strand. This is an intensive, self-enclosed, all-day course of study featuring literacy ESL, science and math for the literacy student cohort, as well as tutorial support for individuals at the rate of one hour each day. The Literacy strand is in its second full year of implementation.

In all strands, ESL instruction plays a critical role. Brockton's approach is called content-based ESL. That is, English is taught using the content from general education classes as part of a curriculum that responds to the specific topics the ELL students are struggling with in their classes. Teachers scaffold instruction to provide contextual information for readings using maps, media and other visuals, and help students improve content-related vocabulary using dictionaries and other print resources and oral activities.

An ongoing goal of Ms. Carreiro is to strengthen collaboration between the faculty at the program serving ELLs and the general education content teachers in order to augment the academic preparation of ELL students as they transition into mainstream classes. She says that MCAS has been a catalyst for schoolwide attention to language and literacy initiatives that serve ELLs well. Schoolwide MCAS results have spotlighted the need for improvement in specific areas of instruction and the performance of certain student subgroups, including ELLs, in order to make Adequate Yearly Progress. The schoolwide literacy initiative, driven by MCAS data, is precisely about language—a focus which serves ELLs well. The literacy initiative also brings attention to the expertise of Ms. Carreiro and her staff regarding language acquisition, and the language-related strategies her staff continually create, develop and test. Ms. Carreiro collaborates closely with the head of the English department in a mutual exchange of ideas and expertise regarding how regular classroom teachers can augment the literacy skills for all children in all content areas.

One important outcome of this collaboration was the creation of an MCAS review course, with one version of the class for mainstream students and the other specifically designed for ELLs. It was the result of ongoing collaboration between a mainstream teacher and several ESL teachers. The teacher of the MCAS review class helps ELLs focus on test-taking vocabulary (especially words with multiple meanings), trends in the structure of questions and scoring priorities in past MCAS exams.

### **The Transition Process**

Decisions about exiting the LEP status are data-driven—based on students' scores on standardized tests such as MEPA and MCAS, and through discussions in the Language Assessment Team (LAT) meeting each spring. The Language Assessment Team is comprised of Ms. Carreiro, ESL teachers, and the guidance staff. The LAT reviews each ELL student's grades, English language test scores and attitude, and gauges the student's readiness to exit the program. Parents are notified of the recommendation, and they decide whether to follow the recommendation (most do so). Students who have exit-



ed the program are tracked for two years and have access to the Bilingual Resource Center at Brockton High which is open all day and staffed at all times by one or two teachers from the Bilingual program.

### Staffing and Professional Development

Passionate commitment, hard work, and strategic planning are evident among all staff serving ELLs. Ms. Carreiro brings over a decade of experience and school system knowledge to bear in successfully advocating for non-native English speakers. She has carefully chosen the 30 teachers she oversees. Importantly, many of these teachers are themselves immigrants, and most from Cape Verde or Haiti, reflecting the language and home country of most of the students they teach. The teachers are role models who reflect the diversity of the student body.

The teachers point out that their professional collegiality and shared immigration experiences make them natural resources for each other. Additionally, they share a desire to maintain a high level of coordination across all classes for continuity in the student experience. Moreover, they monitor resources available to mainstream students so that they can ensure that the same resources are made available to ELLs.

The ESL teachers collaborate frequently with one another on best practices for making the general education content accessible to their students. They jointly monitor individual students' progress in order to make recommendations for advancement. All have completed the four categories of training offered by the DOE. Some of the ESL teachers have presented workshops to interested general education content teachers on the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) and on other sheltering strategies to use in the Immersion classes.

### Supports for English Language Learners

Bilingual/Bicultural Guidance Counselors are a crucial resource in the success of ELL students at Brockton High. They collaborate extensively with community based social service agencies to provide “wrap-around” services for English language learners and their families. There is an onsite childcare center

available for high school age parents. A computerized telephone calling system makes calls in the appropriate language to students' homes to convey news of upcoming events or to report tardy or absent students. The counselors' outreach to parents is enhanced by Brockton's 10 bilingual full-time parent liaisons serving Cape Verdean, Spanish, Haitian, Portuguese, Hmong and other immigrant parents.

Parents are an invaluable resource in terms of supporting at home the work being done at school. Brockton High's Bilingual and guidance staff make parents feel they are part of a team. One Cape Verdean father, who brought his son to the U.S. twelve years after he himself left the islands, stated that Brockton High School's key strength was its staff. “It's the people, I trust the people who teach and counsel here at this school.”

Brockton High School guidance counselors also collaborate with agencies and initiatives that support the families of ELLs. For example, the school and the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy (MIRA) Coalition co-sponsored a presentation on legal rights of immigrants regarding higher education, and the Cape Verdean Association participates in a mentoring program at Brockton High.

At Brockton High School, there are no easy routes for rallying resources and motivating students to excel and persist until graduation. However, the academic progress of ELLs attests to the determination and work ethic of the school's leadership and staff. Passion, expertise and commitment to collaboration are visible throughout the ELL program's leadership and staff.

#### Summary of Distinctive Features: Brockton High School

- Three strands of offerings for ELLs
- MCAS review course for ELLs
- Language Assessment Team to review and re-classify students
- Automated call system to contact parents in appropriate language to convey news of upcoming events and report absences
- Ten full-time bilingual parent liaisons

## Fuller Middle School—Framingham, MA

Fuller Middle School is spacious and welcoming, with classrooms surrounding an inner courtyard. All visitors to Fuller School are meant to feel that they are partners in a well-thought out, high quality enterprise that models the practices and behaviors it seeks of its students. Juan Rodriguez, principal of Fuller Middle School, is a strong advocate for all of his students. He operates with the perspective of someone who actually attended Fuller as a teen and now implicitly attests to his confidence in it by sending his son there.

Educating ELLs is a hallmark of Fuller’s drive for excellence. Fuller staff are quick to point out, however, that the priority of serving ELLs comes from the district and the leadership of Susan McGilvray-Rivet, Director of Bilingual, ESL & Sheltered English Programs. Fuller represents one part of the district-wide design that provides a variety of options to all ELLs in Framingham. Leadership from the district level ensures economies of scale that benefit all schools in Framingham. The central office monitors research findings and assessment data at the local, state and national levels to inform planning and, ultimately, to drive districtwide programming. Fuller serves as the lab for new approaches to serving ELLs while other schools offer different types of programs, such as the two-way Bilingual instruction at the Walsh School.

### Structure of the Program

Fuller has a clearly articulated, staged ESL/Bilingual/ Sheltered English program. This list, adapted from a Fuller Middle School handout, defines the steps from ESL 1-2 to ESL 5:

- ESL 1 & 2 Beginner / Early Intermediate
  - Math, science, and social studies in native language
  - All other instruction in Sheltered English

Student Progress on MEPA: Fuller Middle School		
Years in MA	N	% Making Progress
1	38	45%
2	30	83%
3	27	89%
4	24	88%
5+	81	89%
<b>Overall Progress Rate</b>		<b>79%</b>

- World language and specials (e.g. art, gym, technology education)
- ESL 3 Intermediate
  - All instruction in Sheltered English
  - World language and specials
- ESL 4 Transitioning
  - Standard curriculum math and science in English
  - All other instruction in Sheltered English
  - World language and specials
- ESL 5 Transitioning
  - Standard curriculum classes in English
  - One Sheltered English support class
  - World language and specials

A student’s initial placement and subsequent re-assignment within these groupings is based on that student’s outcomes on assessments of 1) oral language proficiency on the MELA-O, 2) reading and writing proficiency using *High Point* curriculum assessments, 3) district-established benchmarks and 4) teacher input. Placement of students in ESL 3, for example, would be based on the evidence presented in Table 4 on page 13 (adapted from Fuller School’s ESL Proficiency Benchmarks document). These benchmarks represent an example of how Fuller has operationalized the DOE ELPBO<sup>13</sup> standards. (For an example of Fuller’s benchmarks, see Appendix G.)

Demographic Information: Fuller Middle School									
White	Hispanic	African -American	Asian	Multi-Race Non-Hispanic	Free and Reduced Lunch	Total Number of Students in Program	Total Number of Student Languages	Percent ELL	Percent FLNE
62.9%	24.5%	7%	5.1%	0.3%	35.7%	Gr. 6-8, 192	17	35%	51.7%

In Fuller’s ESL/Bilingual/Sheltered Immersion Program, ELLs participate in the life of the whole school along with their native English-speaking peers, and attend most or all classes in English (standard curriculum or SEI), depending on their ESL level; Spanish-speaking or Portuguese-speaking students in ESL 1, 2, or 3 take math, science and social studies classes in their native language, but all other classes in English. Fuller values multilingualism and requires all native English speaking students take a world language class.

### Educating English Language Learners

Teachers in ESL use the *High Point* series by Hampton Brown as a core series of leveled texts. They also employ the literacy practices used in mainstreamed classes and writer’s workshop strategies that have been “sheltered” for ELLs. *High Point* is a program designed for English language learners and struggling readers. Each thematic unit in *High Point* is accompanied by a language CD with songs, chants, poems and text read-alouds, as well as leveled libraries and theme-related books. These resources are designed to help students develop vocabulary and grammar skills in a specific context.

School and program leaders and the ESL/Bilingual/Sheltered English Resource Specialist adhere to the general principles of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol SIOP model. This approach emphasizes student interaction, English language production and comprehension. It includes explicit statements of language and content learning objectives, a focus on age appropriate concepts, supplementary and visual materials, adapting concepts to students’ level of proficiency and referring to students’ prior knowledge in building new concepts and vocabulary.

### The Transition Process

Students’ readiness to transition into standard curriculum classes is not an all-or-nothing decision. Students are phased into standard curriculum classes as they are ready. Some students move through a level in less than one year, others in more than one year on a staggered basis. In the past two years, 27 students have successfully exited ESL Level 5 and continue to be followed by the Sheltered English program staff for two years in standard curriculum classrooms.

A key component in helping students successfully leave LEP status is the ESL 5 transitioning strand. ESL 5 offers a special Sheltered English support class that is tailored to the needs of each student as they take on a standard curriculum in all other subjects for the first time. Meg Quinlan, the ESL Resource Specialist, stresses that academic vocabulary and research skills are often the areas in which most students need support as they transition into all standard curriculum classes. ESL 5 has a strong focus on conducting research and writing research papers.

### Staffing and Professional Development

Principal Rodriguez focuses considerable attention on hiring highly trained and deeply committed staff. This includes international recruitment of teachers who are native speakers of Spanish or Portuguese, as well as native English-speakers working abroad. This effort to hand-pick bilingual staff was identified by Fuller administrators as a key component of the school’s success in educating ELLs as such teachers have special insight, from their own experience, into issues of academic learning.

Table 4: Fuller Middle School Placement Standards

ESL Level	Oral Assessment	Reading Assessment	Writing Benchmarks
3	MELA-O score: Comprehension 3/4 Production 2 or 3	<i>High Point</i> Level B Test Minimum score 70%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Student writes a five-paragraph essay (different assignment per grade)</li> <li>- Student writes a pre- and post- friendly letter</li> <li>- Student completes an oral history project</li> </ul>

Fuller staff model new and innovative efforts for educating ELLs. The school's ESL Resource Specialist uses her classroom as a lab for other teachers to see Sheltered English methods being modeled. This is a place where teachers can seek answers to their questions about teaching ELLs as part of standard curriculum classes.

Fuller's professional development strategy can be distinguished from that of most schools because it is in-house and utilizes the expertise of teachers and staff at the school. The specific goal of improving language and literacy across the school has evolved to a specific initiative called Teaching and Learning Literacy (TALL). This initiative is supported by three literacy specialists who work with general education teachers as well as teachers of ELLs. These senior faculty are responsible for mentoring new teachers, coaching their grade level teams, demonstrating lessons and practices and facilitating common planning times. They keep model lab classrooms which all teachers are encouraged to observe. Meg Quinlan is part of the TALL leadership team which ensures that all professional development planning is informed by her expertise.

Professional development that particularly addresses ELLs has been organized formally as well as informally. One example of formal professional development was a year-long collaborative learning effort among selected general education teachers who all agreed to take the first two DOE Category trainings together. They also met monthly with the staff of the ESL/Bilingual/Sheltered English Program to consider how to apply theory (from the Category trainings) to practice by each choosing a high risk English language learner in the school to mentor. This group worked with the students and assessed their progress by means of noting the students' grades and by asking them directly. Through a collaboration between the districts and a local university, all teachers have had the opportunity to take graduate coursework leading to licensure or to the endorsement as an ELL instructor. Training is offered for reduced cost and is held at conveniently scheduled times in a Framingham public school.

Assessment informs professional development at Fuller. As a recent example, data consistently indicat-

ed that many students were having difficulty reading and comprehending non-fiction text. A set of strategies was identified to meet this need. Now social studies, science, English language arts and native language arts faculty have begun using visualization and questioning techniques meant to help students probe and draw more meaning from text. Likewise, teachers emphasize number sense as a numeracy priority and apply these concepts whenever possible. Open-ended response writing is a schoolwide, all department priority. All teachers design class, homework and assessment assignments using open-ended questions, and they score student work according to the same MCAS-inspired rubrics.

### **Supports for English Language Learners**

Counseling is available to students by trilingual staff whose efforts are supplemented by coordination with community-based social services and support from graduate interns. Volunteers are also a significant resource at Fuller. In addition to tutors, Fuller graduates who are now high school seniors come back to talk to their younger peers about their college plans.

The school hosts an active and well-regarded Framingham Adult ESL Program where many immigrant parents take ESL coursework. Fuller also provides stipends for a few teachers to serve as Parent Involvement Facilitators. These teachers organize evening parent events that engage families in important discussions that go beyond standard Parent-Teacher Nights to include sessions such as "Establishing limits with adolescents" and "How to help children with homework." These evening events are organized with translators so all family members can participate. The school offers additional evening events such as "Math Family Night" and "A Visit to a Medieval Museum," that are based on the content students are learning in class. These events involve a large group of teachers and staff who volunteer to give families a better understanding of their children's experience in a U.S. school. In addition, the school offers an orientation for new parents. To guarantee access, transportation to events is provided for the families. Events are "child inclusive" rather than child care oriented.

Fuller Middle School's success at educating ELLs is a result of the school's connections: to the larger network of expertise at the district level; to resources at the state level and the research literature regarding best practices for ELLs; to international and local channels for recruiting and hiring excellent program staff and teachers; to families and school partners; and the school staff's willingness to organize professional development time for teachers to connect with each other and share their expertise. A constant drive for excellence has been made possible by using resources to inform their own path to exploring and operationalizing the best ways to teach ELLs.

### **Summary of Distinctive Features: Fuller Middle School**

- Five levels of offerings for ELLs
- Proficiency benchmarks created from DOE standards
- ELL Lab classrooms for ongoing teacher observation
- Adult ESL program
- Teachers serve as Parent Involvement Facilitators

## Beebe Elementary School—Malden, MA

Visitors to the Beebe School sense almost immediately that they are part of a family. The bright main entrance has the cozy feel of a foyer, flanked by windowed main offices welcoming school families. A hallway decorated with students’ artwork ends at the broad staircase leading to the school’s two wings of classrooms. The principal, Susan Vatalaro, greets visitors with friendly laughter, and sets the tone of welcome to all families in the school. Here, the experience of immigration is honored and shared by many staff, students and their families. The Beebe is completing the first of a two-year commitment by the principal to restructure and increase the school’s support for ELLs.

The principal has deep ties to the community where she herself was a student. Respect for both the lessons of the past and the needs of the present is evident in relationships among several Malden-educated administrators at the school. Italian is taught as a world language reflecting the immigrant experience of many staff persons and long-time community members while linking several generations of immigrants.

### Structure of the Program

Thirty-six percent of students at the Beebe speak a language other than English; eleven percent of the students are designated as ELLs. Services to 105 ELLs in grades K-5 are configured in the following way:

- 15 ELLs in grades 1-2, and 9 ELLs in grades 3-4, are in full-day multi-grade SEI classrooms.
- 81 ELLs in grades K-5 are in full-day general education curriculum classrooms and are “pulled out” for English as a Second Language instruction.

The progress of another 30 students, who have exited from the SEI class and/or ESL “pull-out” services, are tracked for two years.

Student Progress on MEPA: Beebe Elementary School		
Years in MA	N	% Making Progress
1	5	N/A
2	19	100%
3	9	N/A
4	13	100%
5+	50	92%
<b>Overall Progress Rate</b>		<b>95%</b>

### Educating English Language Learners

The principal of the Beebe emphasized the importance of structuring the education of ELLs so that they feel they belong in the school and are integrated into all aspects of the life of the school, while accessing the same content material as their peers. For children not ready to access the general education curriculum, the full-day SEI classes provide activities designed so students learn the English language while experiencing a modified version of grade-level content material. Currently SEI is offered to students in grades 1-4; there are 24 students currently placed in one of the two SEI classrooms. The students are in the SEI classrooms for varying amounts of time. Some students start at the beginning of the school year and are mainstreamed into a regular education classroom during the same school year. Other students complete a full year of SEI and then continue in SEI classrooms the following year. Many students arrive in the middle or even at the end of the school year.

Wendy Yaakov, the teacher in the full-day SEI classroom for grades 1 and 2, takes content from the general education curriculum and “shelters it” for her 14 students. For readings, she previews vocabulary with students, expanding students’ knowledge of the context of the reading, draws attention to the phonetic structure of certain words and, most importantly, gets

Demographic Information: Beebe Elementary School									
White	Hispanic	African -American	Asian	Multi-Race Non-Hispanic	Free and Reduced Lunch	Total Number of Students in Program	Total Number of Student Languages	Percent ELL	Percent FLNE
44%	11.4%	12.2%	29.3%	2.6%	48.5%	Gr. K-5, 106	32	11%	36.9%

students to talk about how the vocabulary concepts link to their lives. She finds that using visuals to represent concepts, demonstrate relationships, and motivate speaking is most effective.

For children with very limited spoken English, Ms. Yaakov models speaking by giving content-related statements to which students respond using hands signals representing “yes” and “no.” This “sheltered” approach to reading and speaking English also informs students’ writing. Ms. Yaakov scaffolds writing instruction by drawing content and vocabulary from in-class speaking and reading activities and has students apply those to pre-structured writing activities, such as making graphs and charts, from which students can create simple sentences and paragraphs. Ms. Yaakov named curricular materials from McGraw-Hill and Rigby Publishers as being particularly useful for the work she does with her students. She also uses music extensively to teach the rhythm of the English language, sentence structure, and vocabulary—including songs about math, animals, phonics and holidays.

Students at the Beebe who are ready to access the general education curriculum in mainstream classrooms receive part-time English as a Second Language instruction. In K-4, students are “pulled out” of class twice a week usually for a half hour of intensive small-group English instruction with ESL teacher Maggie Xu, and students in 5th grade meet for a longer period with Maria DiBenedetto, an ESL teacher for grades 5-8.

Maggie Xu, ESL teacher for K-4, says she posts her schedule each week and gives it to teachers in the general education classrooms. The teachers then identify students they want to send to her. She works on English-learning skills with students, using her own curriculum (based on the state’s English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes for English Language Learners guidelines). She focuses on enriching students’ vocabulary to improve their spoken and their written English, constantly pushing them to learn and use more vivid and exacting vocabulary and amplifying the level of detail of their writing (Hampton-Brown content materials and Rigby

Publishers’ books are well illustrated and focus on building a broad vocabulary.) Students read many stories about culture, and engage in language-based activities using videos, tapes and CDs, posters and visually based games. Ms. Xu loans books to students so they can practice English at home and compete in the in-class “Reader Leader” contest, which has been an excellent motivator for her students.

The way that services for ELLs are structured engenders a close collaboration between ESL teachers and general education teachers. They talk daily and have regular staff meetings dedicated to examining the progress of individual ELLs. In this way, ESL teachers are able to respond quickly to specific struggles students have with content area English. The meetings also supply general education classroom teachers with activities to use in class with the ESL students. These activities reinforce the English skills required of specific general education content.

### **The Transition Process**

General education teachers and ESL teachers work together closely to analyze classroom data on children’s reading and writing progress, as well as test scores administered twice a year. There is no set timetable for students’ re-classification into mainstream classes; each child moves at her own pace. Students typically participate in ELL services (SEI class or ESL instruction) for at least two years.

A child’s readiness to exit the program is based on factors that include a passing level on the MELA-O, grade-level literacy competency and teachers’ recommendations. Decisions are made in group meetings that include the individual student’s teachers as well as administrators and counselors. Parents have the final say about when a child will exit. Last year more than 20 students exited the program.

### **Staffing and Professional Development**

Services to ELLs at the Beebe are overseen by Margaret Serpa, Director of the Equity/English Language Learners and Parent Information Center. The school staff identify their approach to educating ELLs as based on a tacit understanding of the needs of

second language learners. Some of the staff are English language learners themselves, while others, including the principal, were children of second language learners. Thus, many of the staff reported that knowing how to support English language learners' access to English and to academic content is second nature to them—something learned in the family and then reinforced through professional education and experience. This shared understanding and experience fosters a collaborative culture across the entire faculty and strong empathy for non-native English speakers.

Reflecting the sense of family at the Beebe, much of the expertise in teaching ELLs is a result of informal information exchanges between general education classroom teachers and those who specialize in teaching English language learners. That is, when an ELL student is struggling in a general education classroom, the teacher will seek out information on sheltering content from an expert peer in order to help that child. Also, if an ESL teacher is looking for more detail or better understanding about content area information, or about how ready an ELL student is for general education classroom activities, the general education teachers will provide answers. Additionally, the Director of the Equity/English Language Learners/Parent Information Center offers the four Category Training workshops created by the DOE on SEI. Ms. Serpa also offers all teachers workshops on re-classifying ELLs.

### **Supports for English Language Learners**

The Office of Equity/English Language Learners/Parent Information Center, under Margaret Serpa, offers a needed link between school and parents so that

the latter can understand how school works in the U.S. and what they can do to help. For example, when Ms. Serpa contacted the parents of a struggling ELL student, the child's mother was taken by surprise because she had been trying to follow her son's academic progress and saw several A's in the child's assessments. Ms. Serpa provided a necessary translation service, explaining to her that "A" referred to the reading level at which the student tested, and was the lowest level. Serpa and the parent then planned together how to help the child improve.

The Beebe staff welcome parents with enthusiasm and respect, and value them as important resources at the school. Although parents of ELLs participate in school-based parent engagement activities to varying degrees, all parents interviewed for this report expressed satisfaction with the academic progress their children were making, and with the attention their children received, especially when they were struggling. The shared experience of immigration, the valuing of cultures and languages, and the warm, gregarious leaders of the Beebe School engender a feeling of family. Dedication to ELLs and their families is one of the school's defining traits.

#### **Summary of Distinctive Features: Beebe Elementary School**

- Two strands of offerings for ELLs
- Ongoing collaboration between ESL and general education teachers
- Proactive contact with ELL parents by the Office of Equity/ELL/Parent Information



## THEMES ACROSS THE CASES

Each of the schools profiled here has a unique approach to the education of English language learners, yet they hold in common several key characteristics that contribute to their success. We elaborate those common elements here.

**These schools believe they cannot effectively serve ELLs with a one-size-fits-all policy.** Each of the schools in this study offer multiple types of programs to accommodate the needs of students at varying levels of English proficiency. Flexibility in the structure and format of classes is necessary to accommodate the range of circumstance that is represented in K-12 schools. Some students, especially at the elementary level, may be able to progress quickly in a classroom that shelters content, while high school students who have had an interrupted school experience may need a period of intensive English literacy development, as Brockton provided.

**Adults hold positive attitudes, values and beliefs about immigrant students and their families.** A single philosophy connects the three schools in this study. Their approach is grounded in a deep respect for the value of bilingualism, which they blend with a “hurry up and learn English” stance. These schools display a welcoming face to families and take positive steps to serve them. Case study schools benefited from having fully bilingual, bicultural role models for students—and these teachers often spoke the same native language as the dominant language group in the school.

**Constant attention to data, research and outside resources is essential.** Educators in case study schools were abreast of the research on second language acquisition and practices. They were using DOE guidance and taking advantage of training opportunities offered by the state. Further, they were pro-active in responding to the specific needs of their students by operationalizing research findings, tailoring their own benchmarks from existing standards and creating in-house professional development for teachers.

Educators continually monitored data on the progress of individual students in order to ensure timely re-classification and to improve overall ELL services.

**Highly skilled teachers and leaders are the cornerstone of success in these schools.** As the preceding point clarifies, meeting the complex and varying needs of individual students is a highly labor-intensive process. Each of the schools in this study had teachers and leaders whose passion for the education of non-native English speakers drove them to do “whatever it took” to best educate each student. Many had long term ties to their respective schools, providing continuity for students and allowing deep relationships in local immigrant communities. Most importantly, teachers and leaders were vigilant about advancing their professional knowledge with colleagues and through ongoing professional development.

**Support extends beyond the classroom.** To thrive in a new setting, ELLs benefit from the availability of supports such as counseling and enrichment activities. Further, schools enhance the chance of student success when they actively promote parent engagement (e.g. translating documents to be sent home, establishing a bilingual adult as a point of contact between parents and the school, and helping parents to learn English and parenting skills). The middle and high schools in this study have multilingual counselors as well as university counseling interns. They partner with community agencies to provide comprehensive services in counseling and adult education, particularly ESL.

**Students benefit from a staged re-classification process and continued support after re-classification.** All profiled schools offered several different program options to ensure that students received increasing amounts of instruction in English as their proficiency increased. Moreover, the transition process did not spell the end of their contact with the ELL program. In schools that serve English learners well, tracking and support services extend at least two years after students have been transitioned to mainstream classes.

## NEXT STEPS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Over the past five years, Massachusetts has shifted the way it serves ELLs. What began as an under-specified policy at the ballot box has evolved into a systemic program aimed at improving the language development of non-native English speakers. The state has implemented the MEPA, expanded the pool of ESL and SEI teachers, and established clearer expectations for instructional practice in schools. Yet, the achievement of ELL and former ELLs remains unacceptably low and, hence, much remains to be done. Schools continue to look for better ways to teach ELL students and support them through a transition to mainstream classes. Based on the research presented in this report, we offer the following as next steps for policy and practice.

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### At the State Level

- **Encourage flexibility and experimentation with innovative approaches to meet the needs of English language learners.** It is apparent that much more needs to be learned about effective ways and means of educating ELLs. There is insufficient evidence to justify prescription of a single method. Practitioners and policymakers should push for continued research aimed at establishing clearer norms for what constitutes effective practice.
- **Offer opportunities for schools to share practices.** Teachers and school leaders would benefit from statewide networking opportunities in which they could observe model lessons and learn about how other schools handle issues such as grouping students, providing wrap-around and enrichment services, managing multiple languages in a single ESL class, and selecting instructional materials.
- **Get specific about who must transition.** The state has issued guidance to help districts make re-classification decisions, but it is clear that some districts remain hesitant. While flexibility is needed to allow especially motivated ELLs to move to mainstream classes before they score at the transitioning level on MEPA, DOE should also determine a firm cut score, above which all students should progress from LEP status. Sanctions should be imposed on districts which consistently fail to transition most students at the established pace (e.g. those who have large num-

bers in programs after five years). Finally, in order to promote compliance with a more specific transition standard and to respond to schools' concerns about FLEP students, the DOE should help districts to determine best practices for maintaining a connection to students after they have been removed from LEP status.

- **Ensure a pipeline of leaders for ELL programs.** The state has wisely focused attention on training classroom teachers in language acquisition practices. However, each of our case study schools thrive under strong, long-term leadership by an ELL coordinator. There is a need for cultivating a pool of leaders who can work across classrooms as coaches, specialists and coordinators.
- **Require SEI training in teacher preparation programs.** Given continual teacher turnover, the current dearth of teachers trained in SEI will be an ongoing problem unless all teaching candidates in Massachusetts participate in SEI training as a step toward certification in any content area. SEI coursework for teaching candidates might resemble the current DOE four Category training, which leaders in case study districts perceived as helpful.

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### In Schools and Districts

- **Consider a staged transition process.** Becoming proficient in English happens gradually and often in a staggered manner across abilities in reading, writing, speaking and listening, and across academic content areas (math, social studies, etc.). Schools should offer students progressively greater opportunities to be immersed in mainstream classes. Re-classification must be approached as a process, not an event.
- **Provide guidance for families of "low-incidence" language students.** SEI is particularly useful for ELL students who are not in one of the dominant language groups (e.g., low-incidence language students)—indeed, it is the only recourse. The value schools place on multilingualism should also carefully target families of low-incidence language students and aid them in identifying community resources through which their children can simultaneously develop their native language fluency (outside of school).

- **Set goals and create incentives to get teachers trained.** Districts determine the number of teachers they need to be trained in sheltering content and in ESL. Most do not have an adequate number of trained teachers to meet current demand. District leaders should engage in a data-driven analysis of need by school and actively encourage teachers to get training.
- **Communicate with parents about the school's program to support ELLs, specifically placement and transitioning.** Parents' primary concerns are with their children's academic progress. Building literacy skills in both the home language and in English benefits children's intellectual development. This is a message to share with parents. Communicating with them about how their children's placement in an ESL/Bilingual/SEI program affects their learning is a critical conversation to have on an ongoing basis with parents.
- **Pool resources among districts with small ELL populations.** More than half of all districts in the Commonwealth serve fewer than 50 students whose first language is not English. These districts are new to the challenges of educating ELLs and must do so

with limited resources. Districts might share:

- Translation services for communication with parents;
- ELL coaches to do data analysis and instructional support;
- Professional development; and/or
- Instructional resources, such as books, web links, and computer programs.

At all levels of the system, educators must work to make better use of data and to ensure a positive and welcoming tone for English language learners.

In conclusion, the education of English language learners is a complicated undertaking that requires multiple strategies to meet the needs of students with varying proficiency levels. Further research is needed to establish appropriate transition standards and to determine the specific pedagogical practices and materials that yield the best results with students. Until then, we must encourage innovation and flexibility in order for the field to mature and, ultimately, improve service to students.



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## Endnotes

- 1 This report uses the terms Limited English Proficient (LEP), the formal designation used by the state Department of Education, and English language learner (ELL), the term used by most districts, interchangeably.
- 2 Unless otherwise noted, statistical data for this report were obtained from the Massachusetts Department of Education.
- 3 MCAS refers to the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System.
- 4 California and Arizona have passed similar legislation.
- 5 First Language Not English (FLNE): a student whose native language is a language other than English.
- 6 Charter schools are counted as independent districts.
- 7 Massachusetts Department of Education (2003). *Questions and Answers Regarding Chapter 71A: English Language Education in Public Schools*.
- 8 Adapted from *Designing and Implementing Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) Programs in Low Incidence Districts* (2006). Massachusetts Department of Education.
- 9 It does require that LEP students be placed in content classrooms taught by teachers who have completed these four categories of training, or who are in the process of doing so.
- 10 Massachusetts Department of Education (2003). *Questions and Answers Regarding Chapter 71A: English Language Education in Public Schools*.
- 11 The DOE recommends that districts examine additional data (such as MCAS scores) when making a reclassification determination.
- 12 Echevarria, J. Vogt, M. & Short, D. (2000). *Making content comprehensible for English language learners: The SIOP model*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- 13 ELPBO refers to English Language Proficiency Benchmarks and Outcomes produced by the Massachusetts Department of Education.
- 14 E= Beebe Elementary School, Malden; M= Fuller Middle School, Framingham; H= Brockton High School.



## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: MCAS Scores: LEP/FLEP Students vs. All Students

Grade	Population	ELA P+	ELA NI	ELA W/F	Math P+	Math NI	Math W/F
GR 3	LEP/FLEP	27	49	24	30	34	36
	ALL	58	34	8	52	32	16
GR 4	LEP/FLEP	22	46	31	22	46	32
	ALL	50	39	12	40	45	15
GR 5	LEP/FLEP	25	46	29	22	32	46
	ALL	59	31	9	43	34	23
GR 6	LEP/FLEP	24	44	31	18	27	56
	ALL	64	28	8	46	29	25
GR 7	LEP/FLEP	26	39	36	14	26	60
	ALL	65	26	9	40	33	28
GR 8	LEP/FLEP	29	37	35	13	23	65
	ALL	74	19	7	40	31	29
GR 10	LEP/FLEP	25	42	33	35	28	37
	ALL	69	24	7	67	21	12

P+ = Proficient and above; NI = Needs Improvement; W/F = Warning/Failing

## APPENDIX B: 2006 MEPA Steps by Years in MA Public Schools

Grades 3-4 Years in MA Public Schools	Total Number of Students	Beginning 1-2	Early Intermediate 3-4	Intermediate 5-6	Transitioning 7
Year Unknown	8	12.5%	25%	50%	12.5%
1	798	34.5%	19.4%	23.7%	22.4%
2	1053	15.8%	18.2%	33.1%	32.9%
3	852	5.2%	12.6%	30.1%	52.1%
4	2875	1.8%	7%	31.6%	59.5%
5+	2969	1.3%	6%	26.5%	66.2%

Grades 5-6 Years in MA Public Schools	Total Number of Students	Beginning 1-2	Early Intermediate 3-4	Intermediate 5-6	Transitioning 7
Year Unknown	9	11.1%	33.3%	33.3%	22.2%
1	739	39.4%	20.6%	25.7%	14.3%
2	936	21.3%	18.4%	33.4%	26.9%
3	745	4.2%	12.5%	38%	45.2%
4	553	2.5%	9.8%	35.3%	52.4%
5+	2830	1.8%	7.7%	35%	55.4%

Grades 7-8 Years in MA Public Schools	Total Number of Students	Beginning 1-2	Early Intermediate 3-4	Intermediate 5-6	Transitioning 7
Year Unknown	9	22.2%	11.1%	11.1%	55.6%
1	665	41.5%	15.9%	21.7%	20.9%
2	972	30.1%	18.8%	27.3%	23.9%
3	721	12.6%	14.7%	27%	45.6%
4	552	5.1%	12.9%	35.2%	46.9%
5+	2232	3.9%	8.2%	33.4%	54.4%

Grades 9-12 Years in MA Public Schools	Total Number of Students	Beginning 1-2	Early Intermediate 3-4	Intermediate 5-6	Transitioning 7
Year Unknown	24	16.6%	20.9%	37.5%	25%
1	1443	40.2%	14.9%	25.1%	19.8%
2	1898	26.3%	13.3%	31.8%	28.7%
3	1452	14.8%	11.3%	37.4%	36.4%
4	1056	11.8%	12.3%	37.8%	38.1%
5+	2328	8.1%	8.6%	37.3%	46%



## APPENDIX C: Elements of Sheltered English Immersion

SEI Element	Examples from case study schools
<b>Standards-based planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Created specific benchmarks for student progress based on ELPBO standards (M)<sup>14</sup></li> <li>■ Designed schoolwide literacy initiative with ESL Coordinator on development team to ensure it would be appropriate for all students (M)</li> </ul>
<b>Teacher/student discussion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Created math lesson based on cooking a meal to celebrate opening day of Red Sox baseball season (what to cook, how much, what to buy, what cost). Expanded lesson to cross-cultural conversation about sports in home countries of students (E)</li> <li>■ Turned students' attention to language objectives at the end of class to discuss and determine whether they had been met (M)</li> </ul>
<b>Use of supplementary materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Offered an MCAS course for ELLs with all materials created by the teacher (H)</li> <li>■ Used computer program called Starfall containing vocabulary-building activities (E)</li> </ul>
<b>Links to prior knowledge</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Use graphic organizers (e.g., Venn diagrams) across classes (M/E)</li> <li>■ Reviewed prior reading and linked it to new math activity (E)</li> <li>■ Teachers with same national origin as students linked home culture to current lessons (H)</li> </ul>
<b>Emphasis on English vocabulary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Wall poster illustrated direction words (e.g, draw, trace, cut, write) with pictures (E)</li> <li>■ Word walls in classrooms (M)</li> <li>■ Focus on key vocabulary often found in questions (H)</li> </ul>
<b>Increasing English comprehension</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Allowed students who could not express themselves in English to use hand signals to indicate comprehension of what teacher said (E)</li> <li>■ Included ELLs in schoolwide literacy initiative focused on non-fiction reading for meaning, expressive and expository writing (M)</li> <li>■ Assigned project about Brockton, focused students on recognizing and understanding English around them outside of school (H)</li> </ul>
<b>Adapting content to proficiency level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Used music extensively to teach the rhythm of the English language, sentence structure, and vocabulary—including simple songs about math, animals, phonics, and holidays (E)</li> <li>■ Presented social studies content via text book and videotape on same topic. Before viewing the video, teacher discussed vocabulary to which she wanted students to attend. Then she stopped the tape frequently for clarification, to ask about vocabulary used in context, and ascertain comprehension (M)</li> <li>■ Read segments of text aloud to students, then reviewed content by giving students fill-in-the-blank statements about the text (H)</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities to practice English</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Science teacher assigned frequent essay-writing assignments to monitor students' understanding of content and to give students opportunity to develop writing skills (H)</li> <li>■ Created and expanded on opportunities for conversation. Students loved lesson on snakes, so teacher created variety of lessons based on snakes over several weeks in order to engage students in conversation (E)</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities to demonstrate mastery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Social studies students take turns at the board leading other students in creating group definitions of key terms from text (H)</li> <li>■ Science students develop and present to the class a PowerPoint presentation on viruses; student-presenter engaged other students with questions and led active discussion (M)</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX D: Sample of Districts with Fast-Growing ELL Populations

District	ELL 1996-97	ELL 2006-07	% Increase
Ashland	5	70	1300
Ayer	8	45	463
Athol-Royalston	4	29	625
Billerica	2	61	2950
Braintree	11	88	700
Concord	5	27	440
Dennis-Yarmouth	11	160	1355
Dracut	11	59	436
Gardner	4	117	2825
Holbrook	1	38	3700
Longmeadow	5	31	520
Marblehead	10	48	380
Nantucket	0	55	N/A
North Attleborough	1	63	6200
Northborough	0	51	N/A
Pittsfield	31	259	735
Shrewsbury	37	169	357
Stoughton	20	129	545
Sudbury	5	37	640
Walpole	6	54	800
Westborough	45	256	469
Weston	3	31	933
Weymouth	13	73	462
Woburn	40	170	325

## APPENDIX E: Massachusetts Districts with 100 or More ELLs

District	N	District	N	District	N
Boston	10,335	Marlborough	521	Lexington	239
Lowell	4,121	Haverhill	482	Lawrence Family Development Charter	227
Worcester	3,911	Everett	472	Milford	226
Springfield	3,526	Brookline	444	Westfield	219
Lynn	3,170	Methuen	432	Arlington	189
Lawrence	2,950	Waltham	425	Amherst	178
Brockton	1,989	Salem	386	Woburn	170
Holyoke	1,491	Cambridge	385	Shrewsbury	169
Framingham	1,188	Chicopee	364	Barnstable	165
Chelsea	1,081	Attleboro	342	Dennis-Yarmouth	160
Quincy	1,076	Peabody	323	Norwood	159
Fitchburg	898	West Springfield	282	Hudson	142
Somerville	812	Medford	265	Southbridge	139
Leominster	725	Pittsfield	259	Taunton	134
Revere	674	Westborough	256	Stoughton	129
Fall River	628	Randolph	254	Gardner	117
Newton	600	Lowell Community Charter Public	253	Belmont	109
New Bedford	551	Watertown	253	Clinton	105
Malden	530				

## APPENDIX F: Most Common Native Languages in Massachusetts Public Schools

District	N
Arabic	591
Canton Dialect	653
Cape Verdean	1,367
Chinese	1,593
Creole (Haitian)	1,977
Khmer	2,058
Korean	429
Portuguese	4,645
Russian	916
Spanish	27,249
Vietnamese	1,724
Other	6,721

## APPENDIX G: Operationalizing Local Benchmarks from ELPBO Standards – Fuller Middle School

**ELPBO Standard R. 5:** Informational/Expository Texts. Students will identify and analyze purposes, structures, and elements of nonfiction English texts. (FL 4, 7; ELA 8, 10, 13)

### ESL 4 & 5 Non-fiction Benchmarks 2006-2007

#### Nonfiction

*Student is able to:*

- Respond to factual and inferential questions based on academic content
- State a position and justify/support it
- Participate in small-group activities, playing a specified role
- Take notes (using graphic organizers) while listening for specific information
- Explain the thinking processes used (solving math story problems, using the scientific process) in academic content areas
- Plan, rehearse, and orally present information in a brief report, using visual clues
- Make informal oral presentations that have recognizable organization (sequence, summary)
- Give formal oral presentations that focus on specified academic content

*Student is able to:*

- Distinguish between summarizing main ideas and retelling all of a text
- Identify an author's purpose in writing a text
- Identify words and phrases that signal organizational structure in a text, such as chronological order, cause-effect, and problem-solution
- Locate evidence used to support an argument or a conclusion
- Locate and identify structural graphic features in text (such as charts, maps, time lines, tables, diagrams, captions, illustrations)
- Identify organizational structure of text: cause-effect, classification, comparison-contrast
- Identify general and supporting ideas for an essay

#### RESEARCH

*Student can:*

- Compare primary source documents and other materials that represent different cultural perspectives related to a selected topic or theme
- Identify specific topic-related information in resources, using indexes, tables of contents, and electronic search key words
- Determine the relevance of information gathered and discard irrelevant information
- Identify information that will require quotations
- Relate report writing to questions asked at the beginning of the research process

*Student is able to:*

- Complete an SQ3R and 5 Ws chart
- Write a topic sentence with a clear focus
- Identify the organizational structure of a writing task (compare-contrast, supported opinion, classification, persuasion or argument, cause-effect)
- Identify words and phrases that connect ideas within a paragraph (first, finally, then, next, in addition, for example)
- Place related ideas in logical order in a multiple-paragraph format
- Write a five-paragraph informative-narrative essay
- Write a letter requesting specific information
- Use a rubric to review content and organization of writing to prepare for editing
- Revise writing in the following ways: rearrange sentences to make writing clearer or more interesting to reader; b. ensure coherence; c. add/improve transitions
- Use common rules for capitalization and punctuation (e.g. commas for a series within a sentence; separating introductory words and phrases)
- Edit simple and compound sentences for subject-verb agreement

#### RESEARCH

*Student can:*

- Write brief research reports with clear focus and supporting detail
- Define the purpose (analyzing, informing, entertaining, convincing) of a personal, literary, or persuasive essay





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