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# Increasing Student Achievement Through Supporting English Language Learners

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INCREASING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH SUPPORTING  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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## Abstract

The purpose of this advocacy document is to demonstrate the need for a policy to implement a two-way immersion program in Spanish and English. The intent of this policy is to provide opportunities for students to be successful in a global society, acquire a second language, and develop a strong global awareness. This advocacy document includes an analysis of the educational, economic, social, political, moral, and ethical need for the policy change. The primary needs addressed through research are the ability to implement strong instructional practices of language development for English as a Second Language (ESL) student and to develop biliterate students. A review of current and past practices for supporting ESL students, as well as a tentative budget and implementation plan, are also included.

## Preface

It is imperative to develop citizens who possess a strong global awareness, along with the ability to participate at a higher level in a global society. Through the analysis of the educational, economic, social, political, moral, and ethical need for the policy change, a strong argument can be made for implementing a two-way immersion program, the benefits of which are supported by the research gathered in this study.

One of the primary leadership lessons I learned was that best practices must be implemented in order for all students to achieve a high level of success in the global society. Current practices are not meeting the needs of all students, so the degree of change needs to occur, but the difficulty with implementing change is making sure that the proper level of support exists. All stakeholders, including parents, teachers, building and district administration, and the board of education, must be committed to supporting a two-way immersion program for multiple, continuous years: a two-way immersion program is not a program that can be supported one year and not the next.

Implementing a policy that incorporates a two-way immersion program brings the three projects of this dissertation together. As a leader, I have learned the importance of each process in implementing a program evaluation, creating a change leadership plan, and advocating for policy; one cannot advocate for policy without having completed the previous processes. To effectively implement policy, a leader must have a thorough understanding of current student needs, stakeholder understandings and support, and knowledge of the appropriate steps to be taken for improving academic achievement.

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## **SECTION ONE: VISION STATEMENT**

### **Statement of the Problem**

District A, located in a northwest suburb of Chicago, has seen its demographics gradually change. Through the review of the academic achievement data for the program evaluation and change leadership plan, this researcher noted that students identified as English as a Second Language (ESL) learners received additional literacy support in addition to English-language support. Conversations with reading specialists, administrators, classroom teachers, and ESL teachers made it clear that determining the best strategies for supporting ESL learners is complicated, and that subsequent decisions need to be embedded in research.

In addition to the research previously completed for the program evaluation and change leadership plan, through the Illinois Resource Center District A participated in the Perfect Match Program. This is an initiative that helps reevaluate existing programs serving ESL students by meeting with districts; the program provides literature on best practices and supports staff through team activities and a thorough step-by-step revision of current program content. While going through the Perfect Match Program, a team of teachers reviewed research about the best methods for supporting ESL learners, and dual language instruction was found to be the preferred method. Dual language would provide a strong base in the native language while beginning to develop their English language skills. Although the development in English would be slower, overall academic achievement would increase as students age as compared to students who are completely immersed in English only. Dr. Wayne Thomas and Dr. Virginia Collier have been researching the academic achievement and school effectiveness for English Language

Learners for close to 30 years. Their initial research questions set out to answer two things: “How long does it take these kids to become academically able to do well in a second language, and what are the things that influence that process?” These researchers have continued to analyze student records throughout the years—over 2,000,000 in total.

Thomas and Collier (2014) asserted:

It takes a very, very long time. Most policy makers are not willing to wait that long, to provide funding that long. And so the constant battle is to convince school districts to hang in there and not have unrealistic expectations that it will take only one or two years for a kid to get to grade level. That’s not true for any child in the world (para. 11).

Thomas and Collier emphasized that federal legislation makes the assumption that ESL learners should be on grade level in English in three years. However, these assumptions are not based upon research, but rather political expediency. Thomas and Collier (2004) observed that research has “consistently found that it takes six to eight years for ELLs to reach grade level in L2 [language 2] and only one-way and two-way enrichment dual language programs have closed the gap in this length of time” (p. 5). Although the ESL learners in District A are increasing, District A administrators have perceived that the population is not yet large enough to support a dual language program.

### **Critical Issues**

The Hispanic population is approximately 9% of District A’s population. Although that is a low percentage, three elementary buildings may meet the State of Illinois requirement to offer a bilingual program. District A had established a self-contained bilingual program in one building in order to attempt to meet the needs of the bilingual Spanish-speaking students. Students who resided near other campuses were bussed as cross-boundary students to the school offering the program. Most parents were

open to transferring their students to a different campus; however, some parents were not open to changing campuses because they did not believe that the benefits of the self-contained program were strong enough to separate their children.

After the resignation of the ESL director, there was a lack of information about the ESL program; consequently, students were not sent to the designated campus. The impact of the confusion resulted in another K-5 school, on a different campus, having to offer a bilingual program as well. As the number of students grows and the district's boundaries change, District A may have to offer a required bilingual program at each of its three campuses. As such, it is timely for District A to begin to determine how services should be most effectively provided to ESL learners.

### **Recommended Policy and Envisioned Effect**

The recommended policy is to begin a two-way dual immersion program that begins in Kindergarten and incorporates an additional grade level each subsequent school year through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Based on recommendations from the Perfect Match analysis team and a group of parents who analyzed the benefits of a dual language program, students would receive a 50/50 split in English and Spanish. The program would be housed on one campus and begin with two classes. The classes would split the day, with 50% of the day spent learning in Spanish and 50% of the day learning in English. Although parents previously had opted out of the self-contained bilingual class, District A administrators believe that parents are now striving to have their children develop two languages.

With the policy in place, the expectation would be that Kindergarten students who are Spanish speakers would enroll in the two-way immersion program to also develop their English language. In addition, an equal number of English-speaking students would

also be enrolled in the two-way immersion program to begin their development in the Spanish language. All students of either native language would have the opportunity to opt into the two-way immersion program, with the expectation that the demand would be high and a lottery system would need to be implemented.

With the addition of the two-way immersion program in place, a plan would be developed for intervention and other support services so that bilingual students would receive an appropriate level of support based upon their needs. Administrators, teachers, and parents would need to understand that academic facility in a new language may be slow initially; however, students' growth will accelerate as they mature and acquire more experience in the languages (Thomas & Collier 2002; 2004).

## **SECTION TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED**

### **Moral and Ethical Analysis**

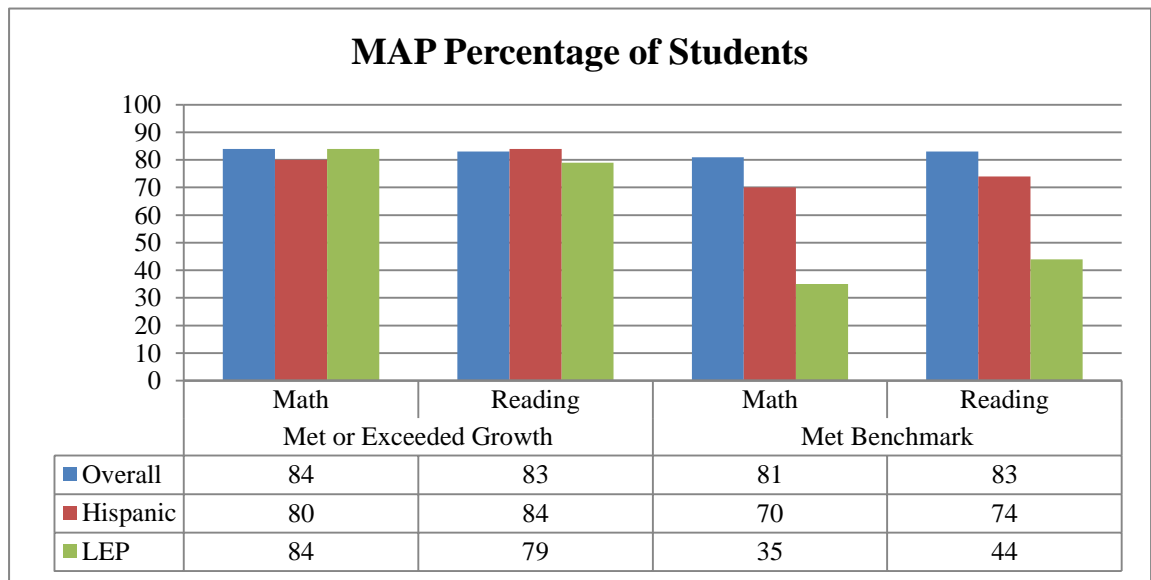
The motto of District A is “All students always.” District A has participated in two strategic planning processes since 2011; through this process, a district mission—to inspire, challenge, and empower all students always—was determined for the overall learning community, which is comprised of district staff, parents, and community members. Success in District A means success in the community. Although it is a small portion of the community, the Hispanic bilingual population is growing and is anticipated to continue growing.

In addition to the burgeoning Hispanic population within the district, the Hispanic population of Illinois is increasing. In the 2010 Census, the Hispanic population became the largest minority group in the state. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011), the Hispanic population in the State of Illinois increased from 12.3% of the overall population in Illinois in 2000 to 15.8% in 2010. The U.S. Census Bureau (2015) estimates the 2015 Hispanic population in Illinois to be 16.5%.

Frankenberg and Orfield (2012) highlighted the importance of responding to change, and potential change, early: “To provide the most effective response, local educators and officials must begin to address the problems before the public is thinking about them” (p. 218). When a district can be proactive versus reactive, the district has an opportunity to elicit processes, strategies, and programs in order to meet the needs of all students and the community. In faithfulness to its motto, “All students always,” District A has the responsibility to provide adequate resources that would enhance learning for ESL learners.

## Educational Analysis

English language learners deserve an equal opportunity to receive a quality education. District A prides itself on providing a solid education and desiring for all students to be inspired, empowered, and challenged. In order to accomplish this goal, District A must provide a well-rounded education and offer the resources and types of instruction necessary to reach this goal, including for students who are considered Limited English Proficient (LEP). In addition to the Hispanic subgroup, the LEP subgroup was examined (see Figure 1). When analyzing the academic growth rate, it appears that the Hispanic and LEP populations are growing at a rate similar to the rest of the district. However, the percent of students reaching NWEA MAP Common Core benchmark does not paint the same picture, indicating that the achievement gap is not as wide for the overall Hispanic population as compared to the LEP population. In order for both the Hispanic subgroup and LEP subgroup to meet the benchmark at the same level



*Figure 1.* MAP percentages of students.

as the overall district, both groups need to experience a higher rate of math and literacy growth than the overall district to close the achievement gap, since ending at a few percentage points lower every year will continue to increase the achievement gap. If this achievement gap is to be eliminated, instructional practices must change in order to meet the needs of bilingual learners.

A student is classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) when there is a home language background other than English, and/or whose proficiency in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English is not yet sufficient. Whether a district chooses to accept funding or not, the district is obligated to follow the guidelines of Title 23: Education and Cultural Resources—Part 228 Transitional Bilingual Education.

District A is required to provide ESL instruction and bilingual instruction. English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction provides instruction in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Students requiring ESL instruction are identified through the screening process as well as a state proficiency assessment called ACCESS. ESL instruction has to be provided by a certified ESL/bilingual teacher, and twice per year at minimum, ESL teachers must receive ongoing professional development in program requirements.

*The Guiding Principles of a Dual Language Education* (Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2007) emphasizes best practices in the implementation of a dual language program. The guiding principles include seven strands: (a) assessment and accountability, (b) curriculum, (c) instruction, (d) staff quality and professional development, (e) program structure, (f) family and community, and (g) support and resources. In the guiding principles document, Howard et al. referred to research stating that students who

receive support in primary language programs achieved high levels of achievement in English compared to students who were in mainstream English classes. In addition, two models of two-way immersion programs were studied, 90:10 and 50:50: either students would spend 90% of their time learning in their native language and 10% in English, or 50% in their native language and 50% in English. Although Howard et al. pointed out that students in a 90:10 program are more apt to be proficient in their native language, both the 90:10 and 50:50 programs produced similar language proficiency and academic achievement. Therefore, a two-way immersion program would develop language proficiency and overall language achievement.

ESL/bilingual instruction also requires education in students' native culture.

District A maintains the goal for all students to become globally aware, ethical, empathetic, culturally responsible citizens. Two-way immersion provides a level of global awareness to not only native language speakers, but to English speakers as well. Through a two-way immersion program, the district is able to meet all of its strategic plan goals:

- To develop lifelong, self-directed learners who are active participants in an ever-changing world with the confidence to take risks and “fail forward”;
- To develop 21st century thinkers equipped with the skills of critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, communication, and collaboration;
- To develop globally aware, ethical, empathetic, culturally responsible citizens;
- To develop champions of personal growth and development; and
- To develop today's learners into tomorrow's leaders.



When structured correctly, a two-way immersion program will develop the students to be successful citizens and leaders.

### **Economic Analysis**

District A designates approximately \$300,000 in funds for the ESL/bilingual program. In addition, the district receives around \$135,000 from state and federal funding. The money from the district is allocated toward salaries; money from state and federal funding supports the program through supplementary professional development, salaries, technology, materials, and supplies. To implement a two-way immersion program, approximately \$75,000 in staffing funds would need to be reallocated to the ESL/bilingual program each year for the next six years. In addition, approximately \$6,000 each year for the next six years is needed in order to obtain instructional bilingual materials.

A two-way immersion program would develop students' native language in addition to providing opportunities for current monolingual students to achieve biliteracy. Future employees need to be able to have a variety of skills in order to increase their hiring appeal; the more skills and education acquired, the less likely a person is to be unemployed. The College Board reported that in 2012, the unemployment rate for students who did not earn a high school diploma was 12.4%. A person not only needs skills, but an education as well: with a high school education, the unemployment rate drops from 12.4% to 8.3%. The unemployment rate also continuously decreases with higher levels of educational attainment (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013). In today's job marking, being bilingual is a not only a skill considered valuable in multiple positions, it is now virtually required. Two-way immersion at the K-5 level contributes to a solid

academic foundation that will help foster the completion of at least a high school diploma.

The long-term economic benefits increase for those who are bilingual. Callahan and Gandara (2014) broke down unemployment rates by age bracket and language ability in their book *The Bilingual Advantage: Language, Literacy and the U.S. Labor Market*. For example, in the middle cohort age bracket of 30–49 years of age, bilingual adults are 14% more likely to be employed than those who are only dominant in one language, as well as receive a higher level of income. Lucido and Montague (2008) assert, “Dual language education is providing a solid academic background for all children while also providing a basis for bilingualism so that they will be more economically viable in the global economy of the future” (p. 109).

### **Social Analysis**

The districts that surround District A have a higher percentage of both ESL students and Hispanic students. According to the 2013–2014 Illinois Report Card (IIRC), District A’s ESL population was 2.5% and its Hispanic population 9.3%. The three districts closest in proximity to District A had, on average, a 10.8% ESL population and 30.5% Hispanic population. The five-year trend for District A has appeared to remain consistent (Illinois State Board of Education [ISBE], 2014). However, in the summer of 2015, District A had three times the number of entering Kindergarten students who required screening for ESL services than in the summer of 2014. Moreover, District A enrolled approximately 100 additional ESL students during the 2013–2014 school year. Thus, District A is anticipating a shift in demographics based upon the early indicators,

and as these demographics begin to shift, instructional practices and programs are being reevaluated to meet the needs of students.

Parent and community involvement is considered to be at a high level in District A, and District A has the benefit of retaining a volunteer coordinator to work with parents and members of the community. Much of the parental involvement stems from middle- and high-income families with a stay-at-home parent or a parent with the ability to take days off fairly easily. The rate of parental involvement among those who are low income, work multiple jobs or shifts, or head second-language families decreases drastically as compared to the district's average parent involvement. As a district required to offer bilingual education, District A is also expected to establish a Bilingual Parent Advisory Committee (BPAC). The BPAC traditionally had very low attendance, however; during the 2014–2015 school year, the BPAC committee had only three regular attendees due to the 5:00 meeting time; most parents were still at work. District A will therefore be changing the meeting time to try to better meet the needs of the parents and generate more participation, as a higher level of participation among parents is expected for a two-way immersion program that promotes high academic expectations.

According to Roza (2010), “Districts rarely compute what they spend on each school, much less compare across schools or worry about equity” (p. 20). District A has considered itself equitable within the district; staffing and resources are allocated per pupil equally. Allocating the same financial amount of resources per student is considered horizontal equity, whereas vertical equity recognizes the various needs of students (Odden & Picus, 2004). District A demonstrates the appearance of vertical equity through the additional resources allocated to higher-needs students, such as those

in special education, ESL, and those who struggle academic and socially. Funding allocated to higher-needs students is a blend of district, state, and federal funds. Staffing is usually provided by the district, but all other resources are tied to grant funding such as IDEA, Title I, Title II, and Title III. When District A completed a program evaluation of the use of literacy specialists, literacy specialists and intervention aides were reallocated based on the needs of the students, not based on an equalized per student funding formula. After four years of implementing a prior bilingual program, changes at District A's administrative level incited its dismantling, and as a result, staffing was reallocated based upon enrollment, not needs and program. Roza's (2010) work contains a chapter entitled "Fuzzy Math," in which Roza discusses the inequity of funds within a district. Examples include non-core subjects such as ceramics, athletics, and others. To truly find the level of funding per student per school, multiple factors have to be considered. Creating a system of vertical equity to meet academic needs is complicated and not easily accomplished. Roza (2010) explains: "A high-performing finance system is one where funds are deployed in ways that *induce* the best decisions about resource use, not necessarily one that dictates those decisions" (p. 90). Implementing a two-way immersion program would require a decision-making process that maximizes academic impact.

### **Political Analysis**

Decisions made in the field of education are often driven by political beliefs; the political landscape of our country is frequently referred to this as a circus or a spectacle. Politics are deeply embedded in families of second language learners; for example, a primary issue related to second language learners is immigrant status. Some states, such as Arizona, are enforcing strict immigration laws in order to prevent immigrants from

entering the state or even deport immigrants back to their home country. The current U.S. law requires immigrants to have immigrant papers (Archibold, 2010). Archibold quoted President Obama as saying that the law threatened “to undermine basic notions of fairness that we cherish as Americans as well as the trust between police and our communities that is so crucial to keeping us safe” (para. 4). Other states, like Illinois, are trying to support undocumented workers by giving them the opportunity to get a driver’s license. Children of undocumented workers are caught in the middle: many are born in the United States and are considered citizens of undocumented workers. Nevertheless, because our goal is participation, school districts need to be able to develop a bond of trust with students, their families, and the community. Children need to feel safe and parents need to know that their children are receiving a solid education. A two-way immersion program provides a foundation of possible success and helps to strengthen the bond between the district and the families.

Bilingual human capital can only benefit the United States. There is a strong need for bilingual educated citizens due to the political ramifications of immigrants and the larger concerns of undocumented workers. As a result of the 2008 Language, Life, and Learning Conference, the *Journal of Border Educational Research* released a special issue about dual language. Students who have had the opportunity to participate in dual language programs are “finding validation, excitement, and enthusiasm over their presence in classrooms” (Lucido & Montague, 2008, p. 102). Schools incorporating dual language are supporting language development and content knowledge; students who participate in a type of dual language program develop a stronger understanding of both cultures.

School districts are not allowed to directly ask about immigration status, though within District A, some parents have revealed their undocumented status to a few of the ESL teachers. Through these ‘off-the-record’ conversations, teachers have come to realize that parents are reluctant to participate within the schools due to fear of being caught. However, the teachers know that parents want their children to have the best they can, so they work with teachers to support their children in their culture and education. A dual language program supports cultural education, families’ native language, and further develops their second language—English.

As previously discussed, the Hispanic population in the district has remained consistent for the past five years, while the Hispanic population in the surrounding communities has grown significantly. However, as a district that strives to provide a strong, innovative education to all its students, bilingualism is a piece of the puzzle that has yet to be tapped. Frankenberg and Orfield (2012) emphasize that local educators and officials must address problems prior to a problem presenting itself. Despite potential concern for how to support a rapidly growing Hispanic population, being bilingual is not a problem but rather a benefit that provides students opportunities for a solid future of success in a country that is changing on a daily basis.

Implementing a dual language program requires commitment, and District A would need to make a long-term commitment to building and strengthening the program, including dedicating funds to support the program—without this commitment, a dual language program could become a political battle that administrators may have to fight in order to maintain, or even retain, it in the future. During a time of uncertainty in school funding, a strong commitment is critical.

## **SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT**

### **Policies, Goals, and Objectives**

The overarching goal of this policy is to provide an education that supports students to be successful in a global society, which aligns with District A's motto, "All students always." The specific goal of this policy is to implement a two-way immersion program in Spanish and English in order for students to be successful in school and their future careers. In this model, students would learn a secondary language and develop a strong global awareness.

The following are the objectives of this policy:

1. Native and secondary languages of both English and Spanish-speaking students would be improved and further developed. Non-English-speaking students would improve their English proficiency and further develop their native language. English-speaking students would learn a second language, Spanish. Both groups of students would become biliterate in Spanish and English, which will allow them to actively participate in a population that is diverse with various language backgrounds.
2. Curriculum would be written to include literacy in Spanish and English; social studies, science, and math content in Spanish; and supporting content about other nations and cultures to develop a sense of global awareness.
3. A clear explanation of the two-way immersion program, including the number of classes that would be implemented, would be written for communication with the school community.
4. Procedures for entrance into the program would be created. There would be an expectation of more students requesting to be a part of the program than

spaces available. A clear explanation of procedures and expectations once enrolled would be required.

5. Measurable academic goals would be established with a system for evaluating the effectiveness of the program for ongoing improvement.
6. Clear expectations for monitoring academic achievement in Spanish and English would be outlined.
7. A communication plan for parents would be developed to encourage family participation in the two-way immersion program, along with a plan for ongoing communication.

### **Stakeholders' Needs, Values, and Preferences**

The stakeholders involved in this policy include district staff, students, parents, teachers, and the local community within the school district. Through the implementation of a policy that incorporates a two-way immersion program, a variety of stakeholders would be involved. In addition, the values and preferences of parents and the local community would be represented through the policy. Finally, district staff would be involved throughout the execution of the policy.

A primary need to be addressed is the ability to implement strong instructional practices of language development for ESL learners. As mentioned previously, Thomas and Collier (2004) have been able to verify their research of effective practices for developing language in second language learners with the understanding that language development is not immediate; it takes time. For English-speaking students, the need to develop biliteracy in a diverse community would be met through a challenging and rich academic environment.



District A is in a community that values excellence in education and has an expectation for a variety of experiences provided by the district, such as rigorous academic courses, art, music, language, and extracurricular activities. As students transfer from districts in the area that provide a dual language program, more parents are requesting access to similar programs. Implementing a policy that incorporates a two-way immersion program would align with the values of the parents and community. A two-way immersion program would be an additional way to inspire, challenge, and empower the school community, not only through the education provided to students, but to staff and teachers as well. The program can be a vehicle for recruiting, developing, and retaining the best possible staff to meet the educational needs of students involved in the two-way immersion program.

### **Rationale for the Validity of the Policy**

As the community surrounding and including District A becomes more diverse, equity and fairness in education are important issues to address, since they are not always apparent or easy to achieve. In a time when financing is uncertain, distribution of funding needs to be evaluated not only at the national and state levels, but at the district level.

District A is in a state that is not considered to have equitable funding. The Education Law Center (ELC) has stated that only 4 states out of 50 have fair funding systems: Minnesota, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Delaware (Baker, Sciarra, & Farrie, 2015). According to Baker et al., the ELC states that those “states have a sufficient overall level of funding and provide significantly higher amounts of funding to high poverty school districts” (para. 10). When attempts are made to provide additional funding for specific subgroups, funding is taken away from other groups. Roza (2010)

similarly stressed that rules that designate resources to particular groups take away resources from others. Moreover, Ravitch (2010) pointed out that decisions made at the state and national levels are influenced by outside organizations, such as foundations, and these decisions do not necessarily have educational research behind them. District A has to take into consideration the current availability of funds at both the state and national level for implementation of best practice for language development. In addition, District A would need to evaluate local funds to determine which additional funds could be designated as support for ESL students.

Another rationale for implementing a policy incorporating a two-way immersion program is the need to develop students who have a global awareness. In District A's strategic plan, the district has committed to inspiring everyone to become globally aware, ethical, empathetic, and culturally responsible citizens. This commitment aligns with the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning (2009) and the work of Wagner (2008).

The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning (2009), in the Framework for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning, has recognized that global awareness is a critical aspect of citizenship. The P21 Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning defines global awareness as "Learning from and working collaboratively with individuals representing diverse cultures, religions, and lifestyles in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue in personal, work, and community contexts" (para. 2).

With the Framework for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning in mind, Wagner (2008) highlights two achievement gaps beyond the local academic achievement gaps:

- The gap between the quality of schooling that most middle-class kids get in America and the quality of schooling available for most poor and minority children—and the consequent disparity in results.
- The gap between what even our best suburban, urban, and rural public schools are teaching and testing versus what *all* students will need to succeed as learners, workers, and citizens in today’s global knowledge economy. (p. 8)

District A has also committed to develop today’s learners into tomorrow’s leaders, and biliteracy is one aspect of that process. A diverse society that is incorporating a larger population of second-language speakers requires leaders who are biliterate; a policy requiring a two-way immersion program will provide the opportunity for all students, including ESL students, to become future leaders.

The final rationale for the appropriateness of the policy is based on the research available on language development. A dual language program is considered to be the only program for ESL learners that can close the achievement gap. Remedial models only partially close the gap while being implemented; however, once students exit the remedial program, accelerated progress is no longer achieved: ESL learners will make one year’s progress, just like native English speakers, so the gap will remain (Thomas & Collier, 2004). Thomas and Collier continue to explain that there is an assumption that full English proficiency can occur in three years, when it actually takes six to eight years. Funding available to District A is tied to the remedial programs and is aligned to the concept of obtaining English proficiency in three years. A two-way immersion would be a six-year program at minimum, which is in line with expectations for full proficiency in English.

## **SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT**

A policy that incorporates a two-way immersion program supports students who are ESL learners. As stated previously, a dual language program supports ESL students over a longer period of time; this is required to develop English proficiency and to be able to achieve average reading performance when compared to native English speakers. Remedial models produce early results, but once students exit, students do not continue to achieve a level of academic proficiency required to be in alignment with their English-speaking peers (see Appendix A). In turn, students who do not achieve full English proficiency become ‘long-term’ ESL students. To prevent having ‘long-term’ ESL students, students need to be able to read in their native language. When students develop their native language skills, a higher level of proficiency will occur in the English language (Olsen, 2014). A two-way immersion program would provide the time required to fully developed language proficiency.

Hispanic students are a growing population and are considered to be the largest group of minorities in the United States (Frankenberg & Orfield, 2012), which is confirmed by the 2010 Census. The Hispanic population is also growing in District A and in the State of Illinois; the current estimate by the U.S. Census Bureau (2015) of the Hispanic population in Illinois is 16.5%. Implementing a policy that incorporates a two-way immersion program aligns with the increasing Hispanic population in District A, Illinois, and the United States.

In addition to the enduring academic impact, there are cost benefits of being bilingual: multiple positions, from entry-level service positions to professional corporate positions, require candidates to have achieved bilingual proficiency. Due to the increasing growth and need of the local, state, and national Hispanic community, a two-

way immersion program would support the increasing needs and demands for this skill in the workforce. As stated previously in the Economic Analysis section, bilingual adults are 14% more likely to be employed than those who are dominant in only one language; they will also attain a higher level of income (Callahan & Gandara, 2014).

One argument against implementing a two-way immersion program is the difficulty involved in hiring and retaining qualified bilingual teachers. Recently, District A has had to increase the number of bilingual educators in the district. There have been attempts to hire, but recommended candidates were hired in other districts that offer a higher salary. Beyond the local shortage of strong bilingual educators, the U.S. Department of Education (2015) has had a bilingual educator on its nationwide teacher shortage list for the state of Illinois since 1990; it is one of the few remaining positions where there is still considered a shortage in the State of Illinois. The Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) (2015) provides additional examples of shortages of bilingual educators and further emphasizes the difficulties in finding teachers with appropriate licensure and pedagogical skills. Once teachers are obtained, the retention of teachers then becomes a critical aspect of securing the appropriate staffing with which to begin—and maintain—a two-way immersion program.

In addition to staffing, a long-term financial commitment is necessary: District A would need to commit to hiring a minimum of one bilingual teacher per year for the next six years. In addition, a second teacher would need to be the dedicated English teacher for the two-way immersion program. The funding for teachers would be completed through a reallocation of staffing; teachers would not be expected to be reduced in force (RIF) in order for a two-way immersion program to be instituted due to the natural

attrition that occurs on an annual basis. Once the commitment is made, District A would need to begin the recruiting and hiring process as early as possible in order to fill the needed positions.

The largest funding commitment would be in the areas of curriculum materials and the professional development required for the success of the two-way immersion program. Even though some items would be purchased through grant funding, an additional funding commitment is still required. Kersten (2014) highlighted the emerging financial issues in the State of Illinois that District A would have to keep in mind prior to committing to the implementation of a policy that includes a two-way immersion program: school funding reform decisions, ongoing funding shortfalls, and pension under-funding. Decisions made at the state and national level in these areas will impact the funding available to District A, which is likely to lose funding in the future as funding formulas are reallocated.

Ultimately, a decision needs to be made about what is considered necessary to meet the needs of the bilingual students in District A. Can the district make a financial commitment during a time when there are a host of unknown factors related to the state and national funding? Does the district believe that adequate staffing will be available to maintain a two-way immersion program? There are clear benefits for not only native Spanish speakers but for native English speakers as well in having a two-way immersion program. Nonetheless, the district's long-term commitment is essential.

## **SECTION FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

This section outlines a plan for the proposed policy. The policy implementation plan includes recommendations for the various stakeholder groups that will be impacted, a staff development plan, time schedules, program budgets, and program monitoring activities. The plan also addresses the impact the policy will have on current systems within District A and changes that would need to be instituted.

### **Needed Educational Activities**

Before the policy can be considered, a level of professional development at the district and building administration level is required. The English language learner policy states that the district will offer opportunities for resident English Language Learners to academically excel in English, master the same academic content, and meet the student academic achievement standards that all children are expected to attain. To this end, initially, a presentation of the complete implementation plan would be made to the district administration cabinet team. Included in the implementation plan would be research to support the implementation and the expected impact on English Language Learners. In addition, the initial recommendation developed by a team of parents, teachers, and a district administrator would be used as a reference point. The recommended policy would suggest a 50:50 plan (50% English/50% Spanish). A comparison of the expected academic achievement for English Language Learners and the development of a second language for native English speakers in the 90:10 and the 50:50 plans would be included, since the 50:50 plan is not the typical plan for a dual language program until students are older, typically 3<sup>rd</sup> grade or beyond.

In addition to the model, the key to a successful program is the ability to recruit strong bilingual teachers. During the winter months, there is the opportunity to recruit bilingual teachers at career fairs throughout local universities. The district prepares a tiered system for potential hiring for the following school year. For a two-way immersion program to be implemented, a minimum of one bilingual teacher would be needed on Tier 1; finding a Tier 1-rated teacher in the tiered hiring plan would be a guarantee that the hiring would occur and the hiring process could begin. If the district administration is unable to commit to Tier 1 hiring for the upcoming school year and future school years, a commitment to a two-way immersion program is not evident. Teachers would not expect to be reduced in force in order to build a bilingual program, since District A has regularly experienced a similar percentage of attrition each school year. The level of attrition should be able to handle the shift in hiring; if the typical level of attrition does not occur, conversations would need to take place with district administrators and the teacher's union to ensure the plan would be able to move forward. The expectation is that the discussion at the district level would result in the recommendation to implement a two-way immersion program model with the understanding that additional discussion would need to occur with building-level administrators.

The next layer of discussion would take place between district administrators and building administrators. The goals of this discussion would be to explain the program design, finalize the program model to be implemented, answer questions, and address concerns. Based on historical conversations, academic achievement would be the primary focus of the discussion. Examples of expected questions include:



1. What is the academic expectation for students in the two-way immersion program?
2. When students are not achieving at the same rate as English-only students, what steps should be taken?
3. How would students be assessed?
4. Would students' achievement levels be included in the evaluations for administrators and teachers?

Research and the implementation plan that was provided to the district administration would once again be provided to the building administration with the intent of answering these anticipated questions. Through the discussion of the questions and concerns, a final decision would be made about implementing a two-way immersion program.

Assuming that district and building administrators will recommend the implementation of a two-way immersion program, the parents are the next most important stakeholder group involved in the implementation plan. A review of the current policy and proposed policy, motto, mission, vision, and implementation plan of the district would occur through multiple meetings at each of the district's Kindergarten buildings. Multiple layers of communication in both languages would be required with both current and future parents. An interpreter would also be made available to assist parents during the meetings. Parents would be provided with a description of the two-way immersion program, as well as its curriculum, instruction, and assessment plan. A key component of the two-way immersion program would be the student selection process.

In the initial implementation plan, two Kindergarten classes of 24 students in each class at one school will be proposed. The classes would be comprised of native Spanish

and native English speakers. The intent would be to have 50% of each language represented in each class. Students enrolled in the site school housing the program would be provided first choice into the program. The remaining classroom vacancies would be filled using a lottery system. Parents would need to express their interest in the program at the time of Kindergarten registration. There would be a selected lottery date and notification of admission into the program would begin the week after the lottery date.

### **Staff Development Plan**

Professional learning must focus on learning. DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2010) explain: “The very essence of a learning community is a focus on and a commitment to the learning of each student” (p. 11). District A is committed to functioning as a Professional Learning Community (PLC), which supports long-term, job-embedded professional learning. PLCs are focused on having a clear vision, with each member of the community helping each student to learn (DuFour et al., 2010).

Implementing a two-way immersion program will require continual support from district and building leadership as well as teachers. Teachers would work as a team to develop a plan for curriculum, instruction, and assessment utilizing the PLC model. “A PLC is composed of collaborative teams whose members work interdependently to achieve common goals for which members are mutually accountable” (DuFour et al., 2010, p. 11). Initially, the two-way immersion teachers would work together with administrators as a collaborative team for a minimum of 20 hours during the summer to review best practices for two-way immersion classrooms and to begin the planning and implementation process. The curriculum development compensation rate in District A is \$30.00 per hour. Each teacher would be compensated for the time allotted during the

summer for an approximate total of \$1,200.00. The teachers would use available data for the students enrolled in the program to analyze the level of English and Spanish proficiency. After the school year begins, the English- and Spanish-speaking teachers would share the same planning time in order to plan daily instruction, review academic progress, and provide support for each other using the PLC model. In addition to the job-embedded professional learning opportunities, teachers would be given opportunities to attend local conferences focusing on dual language education. Beyond the conferences, teachers would participate in PLC activities at their grade level, as well as an ESL PLC. The allotted time would be aligned with existing District A teacher plan and meeting times. In addition, release time, with substitutes covering classes, would be provided every other month to support instructional strategies and curriculum development.

### **Time Schedules**

As previously noted, the policy would need to be presented to the district and building administrators so as to ensure their commitment to the program and to solidify the implementation plan. The final step prior to communicating with parents would be obtaining the district board's approval. Board approval includes two aspects: approval of the new policy and approval to hire bilingual educators in Tier 1.

After approval from the Board of Education has been secured, communication about parent meetings and general information about the program would be provided to parents through written communication in both English and Spanish. The communication would be sent to the homes of all current students on paper and through e-mail. District A also has a virtual bulletin board where all communications can be posted. In addition, a press release in both English and Spanish would be distributed in an effort to reach out to

the broader community in the area. Social media would also be used as an additional method of communication. Additionally, videos in both English and Spanish would be provided. The Bilingual Parent Advisory Community (BPAC) would also be used as a resource for additional forms of communication. In the District A registration office, information on the program would be provided at registration time for all families new to the district.

A parent meeting would be held at each campus for native Spanish- and English-speaking parents. The meeting would be conducted in both languages. Parents would have the opportunity to take a commitment card with them, to be turned in at Kindergarten registration should they choose to enroll their child in the dual language program. An additional meeting will be held immediately before Kindergarten registration begins to allow time to respond to additional questions. Approximately one month after registration, the lottery drawing would be held for students who are not enrolled at the campus chosen for the program. The lottery would continue until all students are either enrolled in the two-way immersion program class or are added to a waiting list. Students who do not complete the entire enrollment process prior to one month before the beginning of school will lose their spot to students on the waiting list.

During the summer, teachers would participate in professional learning opportunities to ensure a strong implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Teachers would also be expected to communicate with the parents of the students in their classes to establish interdependent relationships to support high academic standards and expectations in the bilingual program. An open house would be held prior to the first day of school for parents to meet both program teachers.

## **Program Budgets**

The budget for implementing the two-way immersion portion of the policy would focus primarily on staffing, curriculum, assessment, recruitment, and professional learning opportunities. Odden (2012) maintained that “a strategic approach to using the education dollar means aligning the use of resources to a solid, powerful, and comprehensive education improvement strategy” (p. 4). The strategic plan goals are aimed at boosting student achievement. Implementing a two-way immersion policy requires a long-term financial commitment along with a long-term staffing commitment with the intent to enhance the academic achievement of all students. In the initial implementation stage, it is expected that staffing needs would be met through the natural attrition that annually occurs in the school district. One bilingual-qualified teacher would need to be added to the program each year for a minimum of six years during the K-5 cycle. The base salary for a District A teacher is \$39,350. During the fourth year of implementation, the district would need to evaluate whether further program implementation would be expanded into the middle school years.

Curriculum material resources would need to be purchased in Spanish each year along with paired English/Spanish texts to support similar content in order to ensure equity for English- and Spanish-speaking students. Supplemental materials, costing approximately \$5,000 per year, could be purchased through the Title III grant each year. For literacy and math core materials in Spanish, an additional minimal commitment of \$10,000 per year would need to be budgeted.

Again, one of the greatest concerns is the recruitment of bilingual Spanish teachers who not only have the appropriate certification but level of experience that the

district would expect for a strong two-way immersion program. District A currently advertises most of its position openings primarily through two job-posting websites; District A has not participated in face-to-face recruiting for some time. Approximately \$1,000 would be budgeted per year to support the recruitment of teachers, including a budget for travel expenses to recruiting fairs at a variety of colleges and universities. In order to retain teachers, funds need to be budgeted for ongoing professional learning.

The most important aspect of implementing a two-way immersion program as recommended by the policy is the professional learning plan. The district has developed a long-term professional learning plan for any teacher who has current or former ELL students to include Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP). SIOP is a framework for organizing instruction into eight components: (a) lesson preparation, (b) building background, (c) comprehensible input, (d) strategies, (e) interaction, (f) practice and application, (g) lesson delivery, and (h) review and assessment (Pearson Education, 2015). The training costs approximately \$15,000 for three days for 30 people. Teachers involved in the two-way immersion program would be expected to participate in this curriculum so as to be able to effectively provide a solid foundation within the classroom. In addition to this training, the two-way immersion teachers would participate in local conferences focused on dual language. Approximately \$600 would be budgeted for conferences, \$1,200 for curriculum development, and \$500 for substitute teachers when needed. The anticipated costs for professional learning would be budgeted through the Title III grant.

District A does not have a solid assessment plan for evaluating students who speak Spanish. Spanish assessments would need to be implemented to measure academic

achievement in Spanish and to also monitor the success of the two-way immersion. The results of the Spanish assessments would be utilized along with the English assessments to measure the progress of students in both English and Spanish. Approximately \$1,000 would be budgeted for purchasing standardized Spanish assessments. English assessments are readily available and additional funds would not need to be set aside to measure English achievement.

Table 1

*Anticipated Annual Budget Needed to Support a Two-Immersion Program*

Description	Funding Source	
	District	Grant
Bilingual Spanish Teacher	\$39,350	
Recruitment Costs		\$1,000
Core Curriculum Materials	\$10,000	
Supplemental Curriculum Materials		\$5,000
SIOP Training		\$15,000
Conferences		\$600
Substitutes	\$500	
Curriculum Development	\$1200	
Spanish Assessments		\$1000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$51,050</b>	<b>\$22,600</b>

### **Progress Monitoring Activities**

The previous section presented an explanation that a variety of assessments will be used in both Spanish and English. Progress-monitoring activities will involve a variety of formative and summative assessments. A goal of implementing a two-way immersion through an improved policy for English Language Learners is to achieve high academic success in English and Spanish for all learners.

Stiggins (2006) defined formative assessments as assessments *for* learning: “Assessment *for* learning happens in the classroom and involves students in every aspect of their own assessment to build their confidence and maximize their achievement” (p. 11). The two-way immersion teachers would work as a team to develop a method of assessments that students would be highly involved in so as to fully understand both their assets as well as areas in which to strive for improvements. These assessments would be placed at the forefront of data-driven decision making. Beyond classroom assessments that teachers create, progress reports in English and Spanish detailing students’ achievement in reading would be used to demonstrate progress. Students would be aware of their progress, set goals for themselves, and develop an action plan to achieve those goals. The running record assessments would be purchased kits that are available in both languages. In math, assessments provided through the curriculum would be used, but once again, students would be involved in using the data to understand their current progress and to set goals and action plans for further developing their academic achievement.

District A uses the standardized assessment, Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), to understand how students are doing in relation to their peers. In the two-way immersion, comparison of their data to their classmates’ data would occur in addition to a comparison to their grade-level peers at the building and district level. The literacy assessment is only provided in English, but the math assessment is given in Spanish and English. Students would receive the assessment in their native language.

As the two-way immersion program evolves, progress monitoring of students would be evaluated yearly to determine if the data is providing the appropriate amount of



information for students, teachers, parents, and administrators. Decisions would be made among the team of teachers, parents, building, and district administrators.

## **SECTION SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN**

### **Evaluation of Outcomes and Results**

The overarching goal of this policy is to provide an education that supports students to be successful in a global society, which aligns with District A’s motto, “All students always.” The intent is to provide a quality education for both native Spanish and English speakers. In order to ensure a quality education is provided, the policy must be continuously assessed for ongoing improvement.

Kent State University (2015) uses a process called the ‘six steps to continuous improvement of student learning’, which “develop and/or improve the process of assessing student learning” (para. 1). Kent State University explains that the purpose of assessment is to self-reflect on learning goals and to make sure that the goals that have been established are meeting the needs of students and society. Although the process is geared toward higher education, the six steps easily apply to any assessment or evaluation of a program or policy that has been established. In Appendix B, the steps are illustrated as a continuous, never-ending cycle. The six steps of continuous improvement include:

1. Identify goals.
2. Identify objectives.
3. Specify approaches.
4. Specify measures.
5. Share results.
6. Make changes.

After the process has been completed, the assumption is that the cycle would be repeated continually to ensure students and societal needs are being met.

Prior to implementation of the policy, four of the six steps to continuous improvement of student learning would be completed. Goals and objectives would be established, and approaches and measures would be identified. Once the implementation begins, decisions for the two-way immersion program would be made based upon the first four steps. District A has intervention cycles that include a review of student data; the two-way immersion team would participate in the data review about students and make the necessary changes along the way.

District A expects that all students will be reading on grade level by the end of grade three; approximately 60% of the current ESL students who had been in the district have been able to achieve grade level expectations. As aforementioned, Thomas and Collier (2004) asserted that it takes approximately six to eight years to achieve full English proficiency for second-language learners. Native English speakers in the two-way immersion program would meet yearly grade-level expectations in English literacy; it is projected that non-English-speaking students would achieve grade-level expectations in English no later than the end of 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Spanish literacy would also be evaluated: native Spanish-speaking students would be expected to be at grade level in Spanish, and English-speaking students would be expected to achieve grade level expectations in Spanish by the end of 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

Beyond the review of student data to determine how students are demonstrating success, the overall dual immersion program needs to be evaluated. The Center for Applied Linguistics has developed rating templates based upon the seven strands of effective features of a dual language program: (a) assessment and accountability, (b) curriculum, (c) instruction, (d) staff quality and professional development, (e) program

structure, (f) family and community, and (g) support and resources. Each item is ranked with one of four ratings: minimal, partial, full, and exemplary (Howard et al., 2007). The rubrics from the Center for Applied Linguistics would be evaluated through steps five and six of the six-step cycle (Kent State University, 2015). Prior to implementation, most items would be ranked as either minimal or partial. By the end year one, the expectation would be that no items would have a minimal rating, program structure would be considered to be in full implementation, and at least one item for each principal would be considered to be in full implementation status. By the third year of implementation of a two-way immersion program, 85% of the strands should be in full implementation status, 10% in exemplary status, and 5% in partial status. The six-step cycle would be repeated on an annual basis to ensure continual improvement.

### **Responsible Parties**

An effective two-way immersion program would require students, teachers, administrators, and parents to participate in ensuring the effectiveness of the policy. In the *Guiding Principles for Dual Language Education* (Howard et al., 2007), principle three under “Family and Community” asserts that the program views and involves parents and community members as strategic partners. Most district policies do not include the participation of parents and community members; however, their participation is important to the overall effectiveness of implementing a policy that incorporates a two-way immersion program. The expectations of participation in the evaluation process would be dependent upon the stakeholder’s role.

Students should expect to be engaged as active participants in their own learning; they should create and evaluate their own goals in relation to becoming literate in two

languages. In addition to evaluating themselves, students can provide ongoing feedback about classroom instruction and content. From simple smiley faces in primary grades to more sophisticated questionnaires for intermediate grades, students are able to offer valuable insights.

Teachers are critical about the evaluation of the effectiveness of the policy. Teachers are able to evaluate student achievement data through formative and summative assessments and gather evidence of what is working—and what is not working—in the two-way immersion classroom. Teachers are able to provide insights on the effectiveness of curriculum, instructional practices, and assessments. Teachers would bring the student achievement data to the district team as a part of the six steps of continuous learning. Their feedback would be aligned to the measures and approaches identified prior to implementation.

Parents, community members, teachers, and building and district administrators would complete the rubrics used for rating a dual language program. The results of the rubrics would be compiled; any item that did not reach 100% agreement would be discussed in order to develop a consensus about the current status of the two-way immersion program. The entire rubric would be reviewed as a team, and changes would be made accordingly for the upcoming year. Ideally, the dual language committee would experience limited member turnover each year. The committee would meet a minimum of four times each year for the initial three years of implementation, then convene three times per year during subsequent years.

## **SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT**

I am advocating for a policy that would implement a two-way immersion program in Spanish and English. The purpose of this policy is to provide opportunities for students to become successful in a global society, as students would acquire a secondary language and develop a strong global awareness.

As District A becomes more diverse, equity and fairness in education is important to address. Through the implementation of a two-way immersion program, funding would be reallocated to meet the needs of a diverse population, which is in line with District A's strategic plan goal to inspire everyone to become globally aware, ethical, empathetic, and culturally responsible citizens. Reallocating funding toward a two-way immersion program would also meet the expectations for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning as defined by the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning. As previously mentioned, global awareness is defined as "learning from and working collaboratively with individuals representing diverse cultures, religions, and lifestyles in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue in personal, work, and community contexts" (P21, 2009, para. 2).

A policy that implements a two-way immersion program would begin to address the needs of Spanish-speaking students; two-way immersion would provide an opportunity to address a growing need in regard to language support that is just becoming evident. District A would be proactive versus reactive when meeting the language needs of students.

As District A's motto states, "All students always," a policy incorporating two-way immersion would provide a quality education for both native Spanish and English speakers. Currently, the needs of native Spanish-speaking students are not being met

through the programs currently in place. Two-way immersion would begin to build the bridge toward accomplishing District A's mission and vision.

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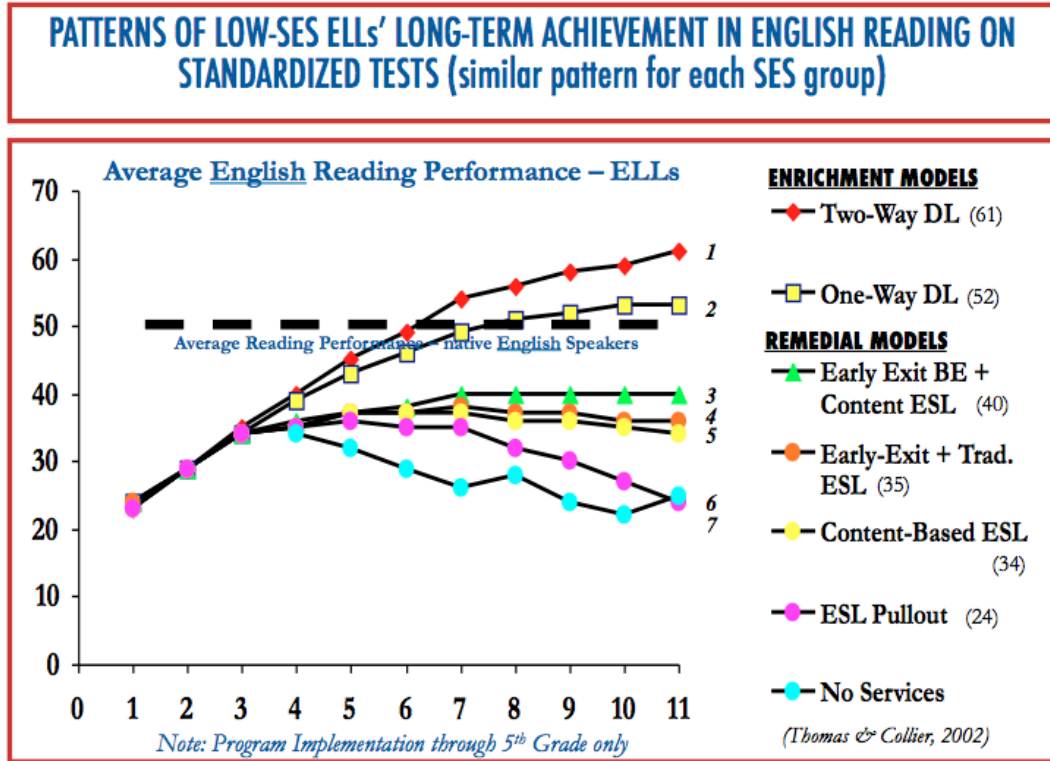
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APPENDIX A

Patterns of Long-Term Achievement in English Reading on Standardized Tests

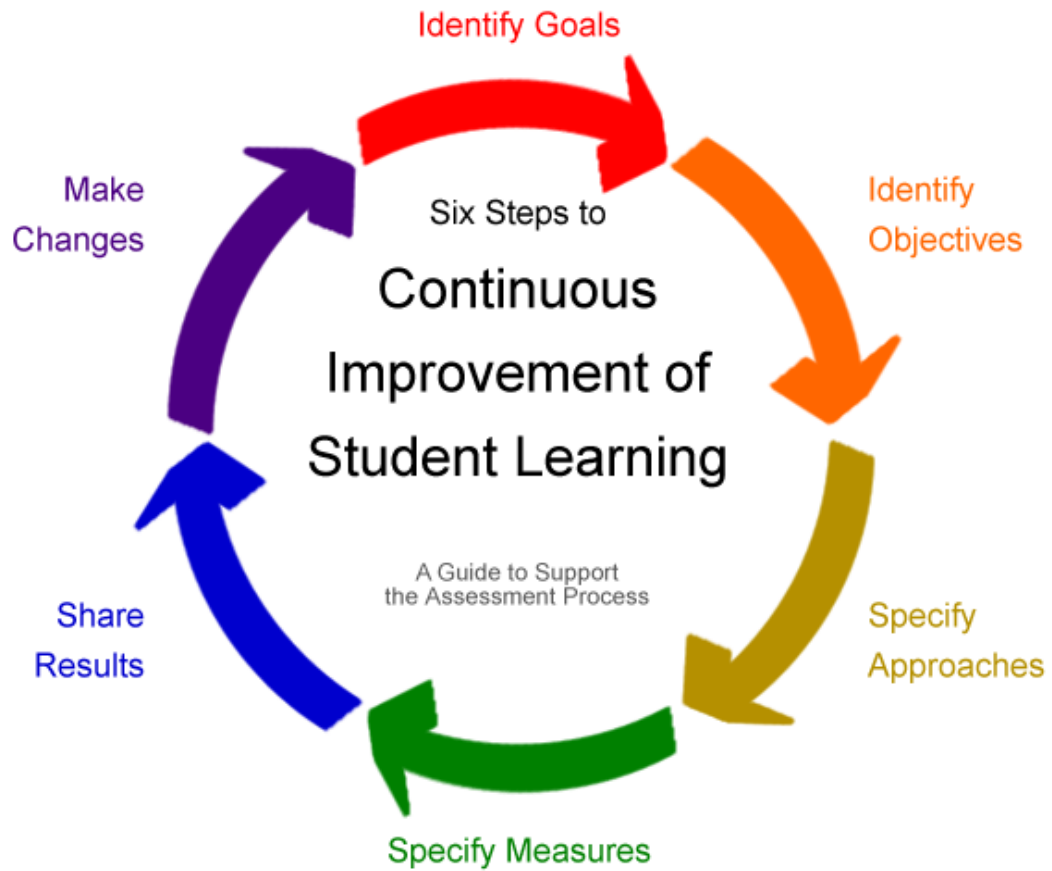


Study included over 700,000 minority language students in 5 large districts across the country. Findings were validated by comparing to school systems in 26 states during the following 2 years.

(Thomas & Collier, 2002)

## APPENDIX B

### Six Steps to Continuous Improvement of Student Learning



(Kent State University, 2015)