PROMOTION AND RETENTION OF ENGLISH LEARNERS (ELLs) IN A LARGE URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT: A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

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PROMOTION AND RETENTION OF ENGLISH LEARNERS (ELLs) IN A LARGE URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT: A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

Hanan Matari and Ruqia Ali
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education
National Louis University
December 2018
This document was created as one part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the Program Evaluation candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the Change Leadership Plan candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the Policy Advocacy Document candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

Works Cited


11.19.16
A THREE-PART DISSERTATION:

LAYING THE FOUNDATION TO IMPROVE LITERACY IN A K-12 ISLAMIC SCHOOL THROUGH THE INTRODUCTION OF A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY: A FORMATIVE EVALUATION

IMPROVING SCHOOL CULTURE TO ENHANCE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AT SAMAD ISLAMIC SCHOOL: A CHANGE LEADERSHIP PLAN

PROMOTION AND RETENTION OF ENGLISH LEARNERS (ELLs) IN A LARGE URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICT: A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

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Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Approved:

[Signatures and names]

Chair, Dissertation Committee
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Director, EDI Doctoral Program
Dean, National College of Education

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Date Approved
ABSTRACT

This policy advocacy document argues for a fair and equitable retention and promotion policy for English language learners (ELLs) in elementary grades of a large urban school district. Increasing access and instructional opportunities within bilingual/ESL services combined with more accurate measures of English proficiency would help mitigate random or unfair promotion and retention practices. A needs analysis was conducted on educational, economic, social, political, and moral-ethical dimensions and arguments made in support of the recommended policy (Browder, 1995). This policy solidifies district accountability for the education of all ELL students by mandating schools provide equal opportunity and access to high-quality instruction in the general curriculum either before, after, or during the school day, thus lowering or eliminating the need for ELL summer school and the number of retentions. A needs analysis was conducted based on Browder’s (1995) work. An implementation and assessment model combing aspects of Wagner et al.’s (2006) three phase and Kotter’s (2012) eight stage models for leading change is provided.
PREFACE: LEADERSHIP LESSONS LEARNED

Advocating for social justice and equitable educational policies and procedures can be both empowering and extremely complex. Policy advocacy is a comprehensive process that requires extensive research and multifaceted planning before implementation. As building-level school leaders and authors of this policy advocacy document, we learned that all too often policies are hurriedly proposed and put in place as an institutional response to a mistake, perceived wrong-doing, or government code violation. The result is the new policy is shortsighted and reactive rather than visionary and proactive. We also learned that federal, state, and local educational policies are inextricably interrelated; therefore, lines of communication among the internal and external stakeholders who are potentially affected by the proposed policy need to be in place from introduction, to adoption, to implementation.

We learned that analyzing educational, economic, social, political, moral, and ethical aspects of a proposed policy provides not only a comprehensive, holistic framework for introducing and making a convincing initial argument for the policy, but also for measuring and evaluating its eventual success or failure. Studies have shown there is often a gap between policy intention and policy implementation (Mortis & Scott, as cited in Al Hosni, 2017, p. 31). With this in mind, the intention of this proposed retention and promotion policy was not to hold ELL students accountable for the results of academic assessments conducted in a language they have not fully acquired, but to point out, address, and ameliorate the reality that there was no system in place to accurately assess the language proficiency and academic achievement of ELLs, things upon which retention and promotion practices and decisions are based.
We also learned that when a policy or practice fails, this can oftentimes be traced to a lack of a comprehensive monitoring system aimed at ensuring the policy or practice was faithfully being implemented and executed. English language learners at the elementary school level vary widely in incoming English language proficiency and schooling history. When proposing and implementing a change in policy or practice, in order to recognize, uncover, and address this wide range of facility with the English language and previous schooling experiences among ELL students in large urban elementary classrooms, school leaders need to begin by evaluating the effectiveness of current organizational structures and procedures as well as the instructional capacity and skills of teachers to meet the challenge. Rising levels of student achievement depend upon an in-tandem parallel rise in the instructional knowledge, skills, and dispositions of their teachers.

And finally, as previously mentioned, to avoid stasis-inducing complications during the introduction and implementation stages of a new policy, school leaders need to envision the ultimate goal and plan ahead as thoroughly as possible while at the same time involving all stakeholders in the process. Advocating for any new or revised policy requires the advocate(s) to have a well-thought-out plan with the incremental steps that should be taken to ensure the proposed change unfolds smoothly. This kind of plan begins with an assessment of the readiness, understanding, willingness, and skills of the leading stakeholders to agree to and implement the policy. We learned that the most direct path to school improvement is for district and school-level leaders to seek and garner support for change that involves the gathering and analyzing of data, revisiting existing systems of accountability or lack thereof, and allotting time and space during the
school day for teachers and other school-based professionals to strengthen their peer-to-peer professional relationships is the most direct path to school improvement.
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SECTION ONE: VISION STATEMENT

Introduction to the Problem

In the summer before the 2014–2015 school year, many parents reached out to the district office to report their concerns about their English language learner (ELL) child’s requirement to attend summer school and if not completed successfully, their children will be retained in the same grade. Most of those ELL students were eighth graders who were notified two days before graduation commencement day that they could not participate in the graduation ceremony and were required to attend summer school. School administrators were calling to verify the promotion policy and parents were requesting the removal of their children from the bilingual programs. Parents also wanted to change their child’s ELL status to “NO” so they would not be held back under the ELL policy. Their goal was to have their children promoted with their peers under the general promotion policy.

Mr. Wright (pseudonym), who worked with the summer school programs at the district for several years, confusedly brought in several cases of English learners who met the general education promotion criteria, thus their names appeared in the required to attend summer school list. As ELL specialists, we had to review these cases, answer phone calls, and provide recommendations to the various schools’ administrators and parents as well.

The district revised the promotion policy at the beginning of the 2013–2014 school year. The new adapted policy added new criteria to the promotion requirements of general education students without revisiting the criteria for other subgroups such as ELLs and special education students. While examining the amended policy, we figured
out the reason behind the confusion. We found that the policy used the words “All Students” with the assumption that ELL students were considered in the body of all students. We decided to raise this issue with the English language learners’ division director to discuss this unfair and unconstitutional act of penalizing ELLs in the district by holding back these students and sending them to summer school, even when they met the general promotion criteria, just because this group of students was classified as being ELLs. What are the academic benefits or gains for doing this? Why the waste of resources to reteach what was already learned? These were just some of the questions that urgently called for justice and taking action. Once recognized, the issue was immediately brought to the attention of the head of the department.

The head of the English Language Learners division called an emergency meeting with representatives from the assessment department, the procedure and policy department, and the instruction department. The request was honored and the meeting was held within two hours. During the meeting, the head of the division presented the amended promotion policy with emphasis on the new changes: the academic performance percentile and the satisfactory passing grade of D in the courses of reading and math. The policy indicated “All Students,” which includes ELLs. There was push back from the stakeholders who were involved in revising and amending the policy. Their objection was based on financial planning. They claimed that the district summer school program was already budgeted based on the number of students who would be attending summer school, including ELL students; teachers were hired to teach; instructional materials were purchased; schools were informed; and transportation was determined.
The district’s data showed that there were hundreds of ELL students affected by the current promotion policy. There were many ELLs who were required to attend summer school. However, they had met the amended general education policy for promotion. We proposed two sequenced remedies to the policy. The first remedy was to take immediate corrective action and promote all ELL students who met the district promotion criteria like other students thereby protecting the district from any lawsuits. The second remedy was to revise the current promotion policy and use different measures for ELL promotion.

As ELL specialists, we participated in phone calls that required discussing these situations and providing recommendations to the schools’ administrators and parents. The district adapted a new promotion policy in early October 2013. This adapted policy added new criteria to promotion requirements for general education students without revisiting the criteria for subgroups such as ELLs and special education students. The promotion policy not only excluded ELLs, but it was not even revised to update the ELL promotional policy.

**Critical Issues**

As noted previously, the district’s current promotion policy was revised at the beginning of the 2013–2014 school year. The policy classified the levels of students’ achievement in three benchmark grades: third, sixth, and eighth. Additionally, the policy categorized two achievement measures: the District Normed Assessment measure and the students’ academic performance in reading and math coursework. However, the policy for ELLs considered only one promotion measure, the academic performance in reading and math courses.
When the policy was amended in the beginning of the 2013–2014 school year, the passing grade was changed from C to D. Using the previous years’ grading scale, the C grade represented students attaining 78%–87% in their coursework, and the D grade, represented attaining 70%–77%. The district decided to amend the policy for academic and economic reasons. There were large numbers of students attending summer school, and there was the high cost of operating the summer school programs. Once the policy was revised, the amendment indicated that “All Students” who attained at least a grade of D and achieved at or above the 24th percentile in the district assessment will pass the grade level. However, ELLs were held to the higher standard of a C grade based on the claim that this grade in reading and math was the only measure for their promotion.

Based on good intention, the district administrators decided to exclude ELLs from the general promotion policy considering the language barriers they faced. However, the current policy does not take into consideration the years of participation in the bilingual program, or the English language proficiency level that ELLs have acquired in their annual state assessment, the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State (ACCESS). Even though the language proficiency assessment score is not considered for determining promotion, it is considered for participation in district normed assessment and school rating.

Educators at the school level were also under the impression that the promotional policy was inclusive of ELLs; their principals’ understanding was that the revised policy claimed “ALL Students” which included ELLs. For that reason, the schools failed to send failure notification letters to the parents of ELLs. The schools informed these parents that they had the right to appeal to the district office. Appeals were put to the side for review.
and parents were informed that the decisions would be determined by end of the summer. The parents were left with no other option other than denying bilingual services and withdrawing their children from the ELL program, changing the status of their ELL child because of this parental refusal and enabling the child to then be covered under the general education policy and to graduate or be promoted with their classmates if they met the general education criteria. As a result, ELL parents whose children met the general education promotion criteria started to deny the bilingual services and requested the withdrawal of their children from bilingual programs. Per state requirement, these requests should be immediately honored. The number of parental refusals increased because of parental disappointment in the inequity of the district’s policy and the school system itself.

**Recommended Policy and Envisioned Effect**

The researchers recommend promoting ELL students who meet the general education promotion criteria instead of holding them back because they demonstrate mastery of grade-level standards. Second, as the general education students have two measures to determine their promotion—the district normed assessment and the course letter grade—we recommend that ELLs should have at least one more measure in addition to the reading and math course grades to determine their academic performance and promotion. Other measures must include a performance assessment that is suitable for ELLs (Abedi, 2010). Abedi (2010) noted that ELLs and special education students do better in performance assessments than in multiple choice tests that assess the same concepts and standards because the tasks in performance assessment seem to be more accessible to those students (p. 17).
Abedi (2010) also suggested the use of portfolio assessment, a form of performance assessment, which includes student’s work as a measure of achievement. This measure will consider the ELL’s yearlong progress by seeing his or her English proficiency level and provides evidence of understanding concepts and attaining the grade level standards (p. 13). The determination for promotion should be a collaborative decision-making process among all the teachers who are teaching and supporting the academics of the ELLs. The following is a list of actions the district and schools need to consider before determining summer school or retention:

- Ensure the student’s English language proficiency is assessed during the mandated time intervals.
- Ensure services are provided in the native language and/or in English as a Second Language by qualified teachers.
- Consider the instructional context and the length of the daily services.
- Ensure modifications and accommodations for testing in English based on the language proficiency level recommendations.
- Use Performance Assessment as a second measure for ELLs’ achievement.
- Ensure that documentation of notification letters to parents regarding the academic performance of their child and the tier of intervention provided to support the ELL through the year are available in the students’ files.

If one of the aforementioned criteria is not evident, then the ELL student should not be referred to summer school and has the option to participate in other intensive ESL programs, which the district is strongly recommended to design and fund. However, schools leaders are encouraged to create their own procedures to support ELL education.
and not limit themselves to these recommendations. The researchers also would like to point out that these recommendations are not to lower the expectation for ELLs or water down their educational experiences due to their limited language proficiency, but instead, provide them with instructional activities that develop their language and their academics.
SECTION TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED

Introduction

In this section, we analyze the proposed policy from five different disciplinary areas to ensure deeper understanding of the problem involved. The five areas for analysis are: (a) the educational aspect, (b) the economic demands and expenses, (c) the social impact, (d) the political effect, and (e) the moral and ethical responsibility.

Educational Analysis

The discussion of the educational analysis focuses on: ELLs identification and placement mandates, the educational equity for ELLs, the academic achievement of ELLs, and high-stakes assessments for ELLs. Also, throughout the analysis, the researchers outline effective strategies to support the learning and instruction of English language learners.

Identification of English Language Learners

The researchers believe that it is important to explain the process of how the district identifies English language learners and the way they are placed in the ELLs support programs. Initially, when students are first enrolled in the district, the parent or legal guardian fills out a Home Language Survey (HLS) asking about whether other languages are spoken in the home and if the student speaks another language other than English. If parents answer yes to either question, then the district is mandated to screen the student for English language proficiency. Then, if the student does not meet the cutoff score considered as proficient in the English language, he or she is identified as an English language learner.
Second, with this identification and based on the ELL student’s language background, he or she is placed in one of the ELL state-mandated programs, either the Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) or the Transitional Program of Instruction (TPI). Both programs’ goals are to transition ELLs into the general program. If there are 20 or more students who speak the same native language, they are to be placed in the TBE program, which requires teaching in the native language as well as English. If there are less than 20 students who speak various different native languages, then all the other ELLs who speak other languages are to be placed in the TPI while being taught in English as a second language. Once in an ELL program, the teachers help ELL students to access the curriculum and teach it with special instructional strategies.

Third, after participating in the TBE or TPI program but failing to acquire the required language proficiency cut off score, the student is then considered to be an “active-ELL” in the district’s system. If parents refuse or withdraw the child from the bilingual/ESL program, their status will be changed to be an “inactive-ELL.” ELL students’ language proficiency is assessed annually using the state standardized assessment, the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA), until they acquire the proficiency score needed to transition to “ELL-T” status. The state requires monitoring the progress of these students for at least four years after transition.

Educational Equity for English Language Learners and the Achievement Gap

Educators need to understand equity and implement appropriate steps to include diverse populations. Borders, Richardson, and Waiters (2017) clarified that “educational equity means that all students, regardless of culture, race, economic-status, background, or other personal circumstances should have flexible and equitable access to resources
that support their diverse learning needs” (p. 20). Alrubial (2016) indicated that the ELL student population increased 51% between the years 1997–2009, and “ELL students are the fastest growing student population with approximately six million currently enrolled in public schools” (p. 1). However, American schools are not effectively prepared to face such a challenge. Tung (2013) claimed that even though the ELL population is growing across the U.S., in large cities and suburban towns, educators lack the knowledge to teach ELL students effectively. Tung (2013) added that there is limited research in this area of education and a lack of political interest which has failed to prepare teachers and school administrators to properly implement strategies that benefit ELL students’ achievement (p. 2).

Blankstein, Noguera, and Kelly (2015) pointed out that disparities in learning experiences have contributed to the deterioration of American schools’ performances. Normed assessment such as the Program in International Student Assessment (PISA) revealed American students showed little to no improvement. The authors asserted that in some cases, American students’ performance declined compared to students in other wealthy countries. Blankstein et al. (2015) stated that the main factor contributing to American Educational decline on the PISA is the increase of inequality of academics (p. 4). The authors analyzed the ACT assessment as well; they claimed that only 39% of all students who took the exam were college ready and among those only 18% of Latino students were college ready. Blankstein et al. (2015) argued that immigrant students are not provided with equal opportunities like their counterparts due to language barriers, low expectations, learning is offered with “endangerment” and lack of teacher preparation skills to work with such diverse groups (pp. 164–165).
Abedi (2010) discussed that the inequity English language learners experience while receiving their instruction and assessment in schools is the reason behind them being among the lowest performing student groups. Abedi (2010) added that many schools and districts exclude ELLs from high-stakes assessment so they will not negatively impact standardized assessment scores and eventually the schools and districts performance [ratings]” (p. 6). Abedi also asserted that the achievement gap between ELLs and their general education counterparts has widened. Abedi examined the achievement of ELLs across subject areas against the achievement of non–ELLs and concluded that the lower the English proficiency level for ELLs, the wider the gap between the two groups. After replicating the same study “post-NCLB,” Abedi (2010) came to the same conclusion that ELLs perform lower than their general education counterparts in all subject areas and they perform better in math than in reading due to less of a language proficiency demand in math (pp. 7–8). Abedi also suggested that performance assessment is a better measure of ELLs’ skills and knowledge rather than high-stake tests because this type of assessment informs teachers’ instruction and improves the quality of their lessons (p. 12).

Wagner (2002) discussed the equity in standardized assessments, claiming that when the SAT was designed 40 years ago, it was intended and normed to test the average White student. However, according to Wagner (2002), the scores are declining and there are disparities in SAT examination scores as the result of increase in the diversity of the students who are taking the test (p. 3). The author added that our high schools focus on a small group of students who are expected to go to college and provide them with quality rigorous education. Wagner (2002) assessed that “we don’t know how to educate all
students to these higher standards, nor do we know how to teach all students how to use new technologies” (p. 127).

Blankstein et al. (2015) suggested several effective experiences from the field about how to move toward equity for all students, including ELLs: (a) teach students and teachers how to be culturally competent and “engage in courageous conversations”; (b) “focus on the teaching and learning”; (c) teachers work on developing their skills and plan lessons “innovatively” to meet the needs of their diverse learners; (c) engage and “empower” stakeholders and partners within the community; and (d) use technology to individualize learning and meet the needs of the digital natives (pp. 251–257).

**English Language Learners’ Instruction and Services**

Alrubail (2016) emphasized that providing quality instruction and resources are essentials for the learning of all students, not only ELLs. However, in addition to what teachers are providing for the general program, they are to provide opportunities for ELL students to interact with their peers to develop their English oral language. When teachers design activities such as discussions, projects, and group work, they are to consider equitable accommodations. The author went as far as to recommend providing a translator to enhance the ELL students’ learning process (p. 2–3). Additionally, Alrubial recommended that to ensure fair assessment for ELLs’ evaluation, teachers should create separate content and vocabulary rubrics.

Rebell (2009) proclaimed that equity in education has been a civil right disputed in courts since the 1970s (p. 15). Fiscal equity was the focus of the court cases. According to Rebell (2009), “in the end of 1980s, civil rights lawyers changed their focus from equal protection claims based on disparities in the level of educational funding
among school districts to opportunities for a basic level of education” (p. 17). Lawyers shifted their attention to the state constitutional provisions and language that specifies the “level of basic education” (p. 17). Furthermore, Rebell asserted that throughout our “American history, women, blacks, and other minorities and lower class workers . . . were excluded from the franchise and from exercising most of the rights of citizens” (p. 45). As states accepted their responsibilities to provide students with basic education as one of their constitutional rights, they enforced educational mandates and monitored districts to produce capable citizens (Rebell, 2009, p. 45–46).

Rebell (2009) discussed the role of courts in “sound basic education” and the actions required. Rebell focused on this issue while attending a symposium at Teacher College in Colombia University in November 2007 and noted that judges ruled based upon the majority’s vote rather than on what was the right thing to do. Because the voters elected the judges, they considered the voters’ points of view, regardless of their obligation to do the “right thing.” In Rebell’s (2009) opinion, “legislators are not willing to do the right thing because the voters don’t want them to” (p. 114). In contrast, there are some judges who do work harder to ensure the “right things” are being done (pp. 114–117).

The Policy’s History

In the early 90s, an effort was made to eliminate social promotion by the district’s adaptation and implementation of a test-based policy. The district identified the third, sixth, and eighth grades as the benchmark grades to implement its test-based policy. Under this policy, students who were underachievers were required to attend a six-week summer program in order to graduate or be promoted to the next grade level. Since then,
the policy was amended and revised several times to include different measures such as
the state standardized assessment in reading, math, and writing. The students’ attendance
and academic performance in reading and math was also considered.

In 2001, the district amended the policy with specific recommendations to
identify criteria for promoting ELLs. The policy emphasized that district-wide
assessments and standardized assessment were not to be considered for ELLs’ promotion.
In 2009, the policy was revised to include ELLs’ years spent in the bilingual/ESL
program meeting requirements. The policy was revisited in 2012 to eliminate the number
of years in the program criteria. In 2013, the policy was amended again due to the high
numbers of general education students meeting the district achievement cut-off score, but
not the academic performance criteria. When the resolutions were amended to the policy,
there was no mention of or change in the promotion criteria for ELLs.

The number of English learners who were retained while meeting the general
education promotion policy was in hundreds. Eighth graders who were not permitted to
graduate with their peers were achieving higher than the required score percentile in
district assessments. Many parents were disappointed and were misled by the schools.
They were under the assumption that their children would be promoted with a D grade
just like their general education peers. The creators of the operational policy did not take
into consideration the effects it would have on the self-esteem of the ELLs. There was an
achievement gap between White students and ELL students; this policy was widening
that achievement gap by holding ELLs back and lowering their motivation to attend
school. They were being held back not because of their ability to master and attain the
standards; rather, it was because of their English language status. Inconsistencies in the
policies were also affecting the dropout rates; the dropout rate was higher among ELLs and minority groups.

Providing ELLs with intensive summer programs that target the development of their English proficiency and academic language would close the achievement gap between ELLs and their White peers.

**Economic Analysis**

Economically, implementing this policy will help the district to focus on ELLs who really need the extra support during the summer and it will save the district thousands if not millions of dollars if the ELLs were treated as their general education peers. For example, there were more than 300 ELLs who met the general education criteria for graduation or promotion; however, these students were required to attend summer school based on their ELL status as indicated in the standing policy. If we consider the cost of summer school staff and teachers’ salaries, transportation, facilities maintenance, the nutrition meals and lunchroom serving, and the text books and materials, how much district money could be saved and redirected toward more efficacious and cost-effective efforts?

Approximately 332 students were required to attend the district’s summer program. Table 1 is a projection of the expenses for a five-week mandated summer school program for 332 students.
Table 1

*Estimated Cost of the District’s Summer School Mandated Program*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Teachers required</th>
<th>Average teacher salary Coast per teacher</th>
<th>Materials per student</th>
<th>Transportation</th>
<th>Meals/lunch room staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>332</td>
<td>1/20 About 17 teachers</td>
<td>17 ($50/hr) 5 days for 23 days ($5,750)</td>
<td>$300/student</td>
<td>$300/day 15 buses/23 days</td>
<td>$25/student including services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>97,750</td>
<td>103,500</td>
<td>8,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$309,150</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Estimated cost of summer school per student is about $913, without adding to this the salaries of the administrators, office staff, building security offices, janitorial staff, and the facility maintenance and utility bells. Assuming that the district’s school-year cost per student is $6,000 for 40 weeks, the cost per week is $150 for a daily six hours of instruction, while it costs about $185 for a summer school day having only four instructional hours. Therefore, we can conclude that a summer school day is more expensive than a regular school day by about 20% and has fewer instructional hours.

Reardon and Hinze-Pifer (2017) declared that “Nationally, about 9% of students are retained every year” (p. 8). While this percentage does not seem to be very high, the cost is significantly high for reeducating those retained students. Lynch (2017) claimed that retention damages districts’ finances and drains federal and state resources. When students are retained, their educational cost is doubled. Giving Texas as an example, Lynch stated that the state spent two billion dollars to educate its 202,099 retained students in the 2006–2007 school year. House (1998) pointed out that “Chicago’s program was costing about $100 million a year for an extra year of schooling and summer school” (p. 3). House suggested utilizing or designing more effective programs
to improve student achievement during the school year. Moreover, House (1998) proposed promoting students and providing them with intensive support for achievement (p. 24). Kenneady (2004) observed that dropouts are interrelated with retention; it is estimated by researchers that “dropouts cost the state more than $1.2 billion in lost income and support costs over the life of those individuals [because] this figure will increase with higher numbers of retentions” (p. 2). Additionally, David (2008) asserted that “it is expensive to add a year of schooling for a substantial number of students. Therefore, in practice, schools set passing criteria at a level that ensures that most students proceed through the grades at the expected rate” (p. 83).

Social Analysis

This proposed policy for student promotion will ensure the equity and equality of ELLs and their general education peers. Kenneady (2004) indicated that there is no evidence that retaining students increases their academic achievement; rather, it impacts negatively on students’ attitudes towards school and increases dropout rates for Hispanic and African American students (p. 2).

It is our obligation to inform the community about the needs of ELLs if we are to create a society of justice and equity where all citizens contribute to the betterment of all. This proposed promotional policy will enhance schools and community bonding; it will also increase the participation of all stakeholders. Additionally, all of our students will eventually become confident, responsible, and productive members of our society.

Political Analysis

The presented policy will eliminate the inequity imposed upon ELLs and provides alternatives to retention. Many districts and state legislatives are debating their social-
promotion policies and endorsing performance-based promotion policies. In 2001, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation held states and school districts accountable for their students’ achievements; ELLs were included in this accountability reform act.

Likewise, our proposed policy will hold school administrators accountable for the academic achievement and progress monitoring of ELL students. Furthermore, this policy will require schools to employ qualified staff who can provide the instructions that ELLs need. In this section, we review policies regarding bilingual education in the top five states having the highest ELL populations. The researchers worked to shed some light on the policies of the five states with the highest ELL populations in their districts. Table 2 lists these five states and provides a brief review of ELL enrollment data for the states’ largest districts.

Table 2

*States With High English Language Learner Enrollments: SY 2012–2013*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States Names</th>
<th>ELL enrollment K-12</th>
<th>State Total Student Population K-12</th>
<th>Largest Districts</th>
<th>(%) of ELLs in K-12</th>
<th>Grad. Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>1,521,772</td>
<td>6,213,194</td>
<td>Los Angeles Unified School District</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>65.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>773,732</td>
<td>5,077,507</td>
<td>Houston Independent School District</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>71.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>277,802</td>
<td>2,692,143</td>
<td>Miami-Dade County Public Schools</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>55.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>237,499</td>
<td>2,708,851</td>
<td>New York City Department of Education</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>190,172</td>
<td>2,055,502</td>
<td>Chicago Public Schools</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>71.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* This table is adapted from the Migration Policy Institute, ELL Information Center fact sheet (Ruiz Soto, Hooker, & Batalova, 2015, p. 2).
A 1987 court case, *Gomez vs. Illinois State Board of Education*, was filed on behalf of an ELL against the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). ELL students’ rights were violated; they were not provided with adequate, sound education and their proficiency levels were not assessed properly. The claim argued that ELL students’ rights were violated under the Equal Education Opportunities Act and the Fourteenth Amendment, which mandate school districts identify and service English language learners. The court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, and ordered the state and the district to provide adequate education for English language learners (Wright, 2010).

In 1998, the ISBE amended Section 5 of school code to add and eliminate articles regarding promotion policies. Also in 1998, ISBE mandated districts to develop their promotion policies according to state recommendations in House Bill 028 of the 97th Illinois General Assembly.

According to Zinth (2005), 1998 Illinois legislation stated that districts shall not endorse student promotion based upon any reasons unrelated to educational performance. The state directs districts to embrace and enforce policies that are compulsory so as to ensure students meet local goals and can perform at the expected grade level prior to promotion. Decisions to promote or retain students must be grounded in successfully completing the course requirements, attendance, Illinois Goals and Assessment Program tests, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, or other testing criteria endorsed by the school board. If students do not qualify for promotion, they should be provided remedial assistance, which may include actions such as grade retention, 90 hours or more of a summer bridge program, tutorial sessions, and an increase in instructional time, and instructional
modification of learning materials. The Illinois state did not prohibit retention, but included it as a resolution for students not meeting the grade level standards. The state did recommend retention and provided several options to support students who are at risk of failing. The state did not specify certain grades levels as benchmarks for grade retention. As of 2018, grade retention in Illinois is subject to Section 10-20.9a of the Illinois School Code (Illinois General Assembly, 2018).

**California**

The California Department of Education (2018) mandates that all districts develop a Pupil Promotion and Retention (PPR) policy. The policy should identify and justify at-risk students on the basis standardized tests, minimum levels of proficiency recommended by the State Board, and teachers’ assessments and/or other indicators of academic achievement. If a student performs below the state standards in English, language arts, and mathematics, a teacher’s recommendation is required to promote the student after proper interventions, such as summer school or an interim session remediation program. Student performance will be reevaluated to determine if he/she will be retained or promoted (p. 1).

**Texas**

According to the Texas Education Agency (2018), in 1984, the State of Texas passed legislation to promote students based solely on their academic achievement. The State Board of Education delineated grading policies for all districts to utilize when promoting a student. Additionally, the State Board of Education designed rules that included a provision stating no students should repeat the same grade more than once or repeat more than two grade levels during the elementary grades. In 1987, the State of
Texas added Compensatory and Remedial Instruction. This legislation stated that students in grades 7 through 12 who are considered at risk of dropping out of school must be provided supportive and remedial programs by all districts. In 1991, the State of Texas prohibited retention of students below grade 1. In 1993, the Retention Rejection program was enacted to eliminate retention in the state (Texas Education Agency, 2018, p. 2).

**Florida**

According to the Florida Senate (2018), the State of Florida eliminated social promotion of students to a higher grade level. Additionally, promoting students on the basis of age is also prohibited (p. 1). According to Zinth (2005), all 3rd graders are required to at least achieve the minimum score on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) and local assessments if they are to be promoted to the next grade level (p. 2). In a recently bill, the Florida Senate (2018) disregarded the mandated retention policy for third grade and mandated the districts to provide remediation and educational support for all students who are not meeting the state standards in reading, writing, science, and mathematics. Students who perform below the required district and state standards shall have an individualized educational plan (p. 1).

**New York**

A decision to dismiss a parental appeal case that was handed down provides insight into the authority of local New York schools concerning student retention. Education Law '1709(3) authorizes boards of education "[to] prescribe the course of study by which the pupils of the schools shall be graded and classified, and to regulate the admission of pupils and their transfer from one class or department to
another, as their scholarship shall warrant.” In the absence of a showing that a
determination with respect to student placement is arbitrary, capricious, or
unreasonable, the Commissioner of Education will not substitute his judgment for
that of local school authorities. (New York State Education Department, 1991,
para. 4)

New York City (NYC) has a unique promotion and retention policy. NYC
examines standardized scores for grades 3, 5, 7, and 8 for early detection of learning
deficiencies. Students are given multiple opportunities to excel their grade level before
they are either retained or promoted. Instructional support and support outside of school
is also provided to the students. In 2005, many students fell under the category of “in-
need” of extra assistance, but only a few students were retained due to a lack of
instructional support and resources. However, this was not the case a few years before
2005. According to the National Center for Fair and Open Testing, New York City
decided to retain thousands of children based on low Comprehensive Tests of Basic
Skills. A non-profit group, Advocates for Children, filed a lawsuit against the city.
According to the Advocates for Children, the board of education policy mandates
retention on the basis of a full individual evaluation of the student which included a
composite of test scores, teacher evaluation, and attendance. All these categories are to
be assessed prior to retaining a student.

Table 3 presents a comparison of the promotion/retention policies for the
aforementioned states and school districts having large populations of English language
learners. The policy researchers focus on the benchmark grades and the subject areas the
states and their districts concentrate on to measure students’ performance and
achievement. We also focus on whether the state or the district requires an exit exam to enter high school and on graduation assessments if available.

Table 3

A Comparison: States’ and Districts’ Promotion and Retention Policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States</th>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>State/District promotion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>Entry to middle school 7th grade and entry to high school 9th grade</td>
<td>reading, English language arts, and math</td>
<td>State STAR program</td>
<td>Direct local Authorities Permits retentions depending upon each school’s or district’s configuration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>3rd, 5th and 8th</td>
<td>reading for 3rd, reading and math for 5th and 8th grades</td>
<td>State selected</td>
<td>Legislative specifications given to local authorities; recently prohibited retention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>reading</td>
<td>Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) and local assessments</td>
<td>Requirement is only for 3rd grade; retention if not pass the FCAT Direct local Authorities for other grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Assess 3-8 grades 4 &amp; 8</td>
<td>reading and math</td>
<td>DET 902</td>
<td>Direct Local Authorities Permits retention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>Assess 3-8 grades reading and math 5 &amp; 8 grades science</td>
<td>reading, English language arts, and math science</td>
<td>PARCC For reading and Math Illinois Science Assessment (ISA)</td>
<td>Direct Local Authorities Permits retention Provides guidelines for Summer school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Moral and Ethical Analysis

According to the U.S. Constitution, all people should be treated equally. In this policy study, the district’s promotional policy is not constitutional because it unintentionally discriminates against the ELLs. The authors of this paper use the word “unintentionally” because the district’s policy was not well thought out; policy writers did not put cause against ELLs; rather, the section concerning ELLs was ignored until pointed out by parents and teachers. Likewise, the Illinois Constitution directs the state to “provide for an efficient system of high quality public educational institutions and services”. (Constitution of the State of Illinois, article X, Section1). Therefore, education is a moral and ethical obligation of the State of Illinois to all of its students attending schools. All students, including English language learners, deserve educational opportunities and environments that allow them to grow academically, socially, and emotionally.

Roderick, Bryk, Jacob, Easton, and Allensworth’s (1999) discussed Chicago’s promotion policy. The authors listed two major benefits of this policy, stating that students are not moving to the next grade level without mastering the standards, and they are high school ready with the required basic skills. In addition, the policy is not only going to benefit “low-performing” students, but instead all students will benefit because they will put forth effort to learn and the teachers will prepare and deliver quality instruction (p. 5). Roderick et al. (1999) also cited the work of Robert Hauser which sheds light on the disadvantages of the policy by pointing out that disadvantaged students and “minority students” are the most affected negatively by the retention policy. Hauser
added that there is no strong evidence that retaining students increases achievement (p. 4).

Moreover, Roderick et al. (1999) discussed why “testing experts” recommend using more than one measure, such as only test scores, to determine the promotion or retention of students (p. 7). When studying the impact of the summer school learning on 6th grade students, Roderick et al.’s findings confirmed that a Summer Bridge program had a short term impact on students’ academic progress (p. 25).

At the early creation of Chicago’s promotion policy, ELL students were excluded from the policy if they participated in the bilingual program for three years or less. But eventually, they were promoted regardless they participated or not. The scores of ELL, who participated in the ISAT exam were excluded as well (pp. 10, 45). Later on in 1999, the promotion criteria for bilingual students was changed to include bilingual students who completed four years in the bilingual program (Roderick et al., 1999, p. 64). There was no measure for evaluating the achievement of bilingual students who did not complete the four years, which indicated the inclusion of mostly all bilingual students in the third grade (p. 65).

**ELL Assessment: Standardized Assessment, Accommodations, Modifications**

Fenner (2016) claimed that most state assessments are designed for native English speakers, not necessarily for ELL students. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) revealed in 2013 that ELL students earned significantly lower scores in reading and math compared to native English-speaking students in grades 4, 8, and 12. Fenner (2016) added that the gap in scores widened as the grade level increased.
Regardless, if ELL students are receiving language support services or not, they are held accountable and compared with native language speakers (p. 1).

Many essential factors influence ELL students’ assessment scores; these factors must be taken into consideration when preparing assessments. Pitoniak et al. (2009) pointed out a few of these factors. First, students come from different linguistic backgrounds. Though a majority of students are Spanish-speaking, there are about 400 different international languages spoken by ELL students. Second, ELL students may have varying levels of proficiency in the English language. Third, these students may have had varying degrees of formal schooling in their native land. Fourth, there should be no assumption that ELL students have had exposure to standardized testing. They might have no clue about how to respond to the questions presented to them, particularly when these are presented in their non-native language. Last, Pitoniak et al. (2009) mentioned that ELL students might have varying degrees of exposure to and understanding of mainstream U.S. culture. Questions requiring underlying cultural knowledge negatively impact ELL student assessment scores (p. 6–8).

ELL students’ standardized scores can improve and can be measured more accurately by incorporating a few test accommodations. Pitoniak et al. (2009) noted that there are three different types of testing accommodation to increase test equity, and explained that testing accommodations mean changes to the environment or the process of test taking without altering the assessment itself. Testing modifications, on the other hand, are changes to the assessment itself. Testing variation is the combination of testing accommodations and testing modification. In testing variation, the test environment and the test itself are altered (p. 22). Fenner (2016) maintained that each state has
accommodation policies for its ELL students; teachers should be aware of these policies and integrate accommodations as suited for a particular student. Examples of accommodations can be as simple as providing a dictionary or reading the test aloud to the ELL students (p. 2). Ferlazzo and Sypnieski (2012) reported that researchers “have recommended that teachers implement test modifications for their ELLs, such as simplifying test questions or allowing the use of bilingual dictionaries. This can help to prevent language limitations from unnecessarily sacrificing ELLs’ test performance”. (Ferlazzo & Sypnieski, 2012, p. 1).

**ELL Assessment: Informal Assessment**

Informal assessment can increase equity in classrooms. According to Colorado (2007), the two commonly used informal assessments methods are performance-based assessments and portfolio assessments. The author explains that performance-based assessments are based on teachers’ instructions and student performance in the classroom. ELL students can express their proficiency through presentations, oral reports, demonstrations, written assignments, and portfolios. A fair judgment on the progress of the ELL student can be made over a given period of time. Colorado (2007) clarified that portfolios provide a descriptive and visual progress report on what a student attains over a given period of time (p. 1–2).

Gottlieb and Nguyen (2007) explained that ELLs in bilingual and dual language programs must have different types of assessment in order to measure not only their academics performance, but their English language proficiency and cross-cultural competencies (p. 65). Furthermore, the authors suggested “using the pivotal portfolio to profile students learning. The pivotal portfolio is an organized, systematic collection of
critical evidence of student’s learning over time based on common assessments” (p. 75).

Gottlieb and Nguyen also identified a system of accountability that is shared among “teachers, administrators, and the greater community” (p. 153).
SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT

Goals and Objectives

The goal of this policy advocacy paper is to change the criteria for ELLs’ promotion and retention. In the school district’s current promotion policy, ELLs are required to participate in summer school programs if their grades in reading and/or math are below C, regardless of their language proficiency and district-wide assessment scores.

Our policy advocacy seeks fairness and equity for English language learners. The proposed policy will promote ELLs’ self-esteem, address their social and emotional needs, and decrease the drop-out rate among them by increasing their academic achievement. The policy consists of a comprehensive plan that addresses all of the stakeholders’ needs and concerns, which will facilitate adoption by the district. In addition, this proposed policy is advocating for equity in the promotion policy among all students in the school district. The current policy indicates that active English learners are not to be held back based on their scores on the Standardized District Assessment. The only promotion criterion for ELLs is to acquire an average course grade in reading and math in the student’s native language or in English.

The promotion policy for ELLs uses only one measure for promotion; in contrast, the general education students are evaluated by two performance measures: the Standardized District Assessment and the course grade in reading and math to determine promotion. Moreover, the current policy lacks specific language that (a) ensures fairness and equitable education, (b) ensures that ELL students are receiving instruction by a certified and qualified teacher, and (c) provides recommendations for grading English
language learners. Continuing on, the district does not mandate its schools to monitor the progress of ELLs in language development or academic performances.

**Rationale for the Validity of the Policy**

It is the responsibility of school districts to provide for the education of all students including students with special needs and students who are coming from homes wherein languages other than English are spoken. As educators, we are obligated by law to treat students equally and not to discriminate against any specific group base on their classification.

The validity of our proposed invigorated policy is based on our moral and legal obligation to advocate for the well-being as well as the emotional and academic achievement of English language learners. It is legally mandated that the school district provide quality and sound education for all students because this is their civil right.

Our moral obligation is supported further by the work of Fullan (2013) and Ravitch (2010) who emphasized the urgency of meeting students’ needs and not set them on a path to failure. In order to narrow the achievement gap between our ELLs and their English-speaking peers, we need to provide English language learners with equity education. Wagner (2002) discussed two different achievement gaps that exist in the American education system: one achievement gap exists locally between White students and minority students (black students, Hispanic students and ELLs) based on their ethnic groups and another achievement gap exists globally when comparing U.S. students to their like-age students from different countries. These two achievement gaps are a call for educational reform.
One of this policy’s researchers was assigned to work at the district office to review parental appeals and answer questions about the district’s promotion policy. While working with a colleague in reviewing different cases, the matter of unfairness would surface each time. The researchers were convinced that ELL students were not treated equally under the existing policy. If parents have a clear understanding of the processes and protocols, they will be able to effectively advocate for their children and advocate for changing the district’s promotion policy.
SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT

Introduction

In this section, we provide arguments in favor of the proposed policy (Pros) and some possible arguments against (Cons) changing the district’s current promotion policy criteria for ELLs based on research findings, public and professional opinions, and other relevant factors. Specifically, we analyzed the possible effects of the proposed policy changes on all stakeholders, including staff members, parents, community members, and, of course, ELL students. First, we begin with a brief overview of education policy for ELLs at the federal and state levels.

Education Policy and ELLs

With the last two reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, states have come under increasing pressure to hold schools to higher accountability for students’ achievement. One impact of this heightened accountability has been to quicken the already rising undertaking away from social promotion to a policy of grade retention for those not meeting described standards. Grade retention is not mandated by federal law. Rather, as is clear from the 2001 reauthorization of NCLB, federal law sets only minimum requirements for statewide accountability systems. States use these guidelines for defining “Adequate Yearly Progress,” designing their own testing, and determining their high schools’ exit exam scores. This imposed upon individual states and school districts the task of creating policies that specify required grade retention and the mandated level of achievement on standardized assessments needed to pass and graduate from elementary schools. In 2015, the federal government under former President Obama issued the Every Student Succeeds Act. This Act eliminated the old
impracticality of the NCLB Act and “recognized the unique needs of ELLs by acknowledging ‘subgroups of ELLs’” (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 4). The Department of Education advised states to use Title III grants to provide professional development activities for teachers in addition to creating measures and tools to evaluate the development of the English language proficiency and the academic progress of ELLs.

In developing educational policy, it is imperative to consider the policy’s potential. Mortis and Scott (as cited in Al Hosni, 2017) stated that “there is [a] gap between the intentions of policy makers and the implementation of policy in schools” (p. 31). Al Hosni discussed the argument Mortis and Scott raised for policy implementation: the clearness of the policy, the allocations of funds and resources, as well as the qualifications of the staff involved to implementing and monitoring the policy. Consequently, it is important for “policymakers [to] negotiate the implementation plan in the community of practice to facilitate the understanding of any obscure issues and assist the measurement of the achievement of the policy goals” (Al Hosni, 2017, p. 31).

The district’s original version of the current policy goes back to the mid-90s; the goal was to prevent social promotion and embrace schools’ accountability for students’ achievements. The district policy had been revised many times. Originally, it was created with the intention of protecting English learners from failure and not holding them accountable to the state standardized assessment due to their limited proficiency in the English language. Heubert and Hauser (1999) addressed the invalidity of testing English learners in a language they had not yet acquired proficiency in (p. 16).
Arguments in Favor of the Proposed Policy (Pros)

This policy advocates for change in the promotion criteria for English language learners, the elimination of the number of ELL students who would be required to attend summer school, and to help reduce the potential rates of English learners dropping-out of school. This proposed policy suggests using other measures to evaluate ELL students’ academic and language development beside final grades, such as performance assessment and the annual assessment ACCESS. Holding students back academically affects students’ emotional and social wellbeing because they typically develop low self-esteem and negative attitudes toward school as a result.

Research shows that there is no significant impact on retained students’ achievement. This fact was not only proven in the U.S., but also in Canada, Australia and European countries through a study conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The OECD (2012) reported that “grade repetition is costly and ineffective in raising educational outcomes. Alternative strategies to reduce this practice include: preventing repetition by addressing learning gaps during the school year . . . and raising awareness to change the cultural support for repetition” (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2012, p. 10).

In Roderick et al.’s. (1999) study on social promotion in which they discussed Chicago’s promotion policy, the researchers cited the work of Robert Hauser who shed light on the shortcomings of the policy by pointing out that disadvantaged students and minority students are the ones most negatively affected by this kind of retention policy. The authors added that there is no strong evidence that retaining students increases
achievement (p. 4). Roderick and Nagaoka (2005) examined the progress of retained students and confirmed that those students continued to struggle after retention.

**Possible Arguments for Opposing the Proposed Policy (Cons)**

Some may argue that if the new policy is implemented, the district will face other complications such as the cost of recruiting and hiring certified bilingual and ESL teachers, the lack of curricular resources offered in different native languages (Chin, 2015), and the inequity between the general education students and ELL students in the ways their performances are being measured.

First, adversaries of this proposed policy would say that the lack of endorsed and trained teachers who are skilled in providing quality instruction for English learners is constantly an issue because there is a shortage of bilingual/ESL teachers in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Education, 2017, p. 1). In addition, hiring more bilingual/ESL teachers will drain the budget and the resources of the schools and the district because these teachers will work with fewer numbers of students and they will be hired in addition to the teachers already needed for the number of students in the general education populations of the schools.

Second, the absence of available curricular material produced in the ELLs’ native languages is another challenge that may hinder the implementation of this policy. Even if the district purchases educational materials from the students’ countries of origin, these materials would not be aligned to the district’s and the state’s standards nor be reflective of American culture and values.

Third, the proposed policy opponents would question the equity for general education students. While English learners are provided with the opportunity to be
assessed with different types of assessments and they will be able to demonstrate their mastery of concepts through formative and performance assessment, general education students are measured using standardized assessments and their course work grades. In addition, ELLs are provided with time to produce the final product or project, while the general education students are under stress because their standardized assessment is timed. For example, ELLs are given the opportunity to demonstrate their mastery of concepts in a relaxed environment with the support of the bilingual/ESL teachers who provide meaningful feedback and extra time.

The final conclusion of these opposing arguments can easily be that it will be more financially economical for the district and academically beneficial for English language learners to attend summer school and/or repeat the grade and thereby gain more exposure to the English language. In the view of advocates for the proposed policy, these types of arguments seem to reflect the kind of values and thinking that have perpetuated a cycle of inequity that continues to prop up systemic injustice and deny change in education and many other areas of our society.
SECTION FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Introduction

In the broadest sense, the context and purpose of this proposed promotion and retention policy is to promote a fair and democratic society where all groups of people regardless of their classification are treated equitably. The goal is to redress and level the playing field for ELLs regarding grade level promotion and retention decisions. We believe many local and state policies, or lack thereof, negatively impact decisions made about promotion and retention of elementary ELL students. We also believe the current application and combination of assessments used to base promotion and retention decisions upon are inappropriate thus, all too often, resulting in inaccurate and unfair measures of an ELL’s language proficiency and knowledge of the general curriculum.

In attempting to rectify this situation with a new or revised more effective and equitable policy, it is important to start with, continue to develop, and monitor a well-thought-through implementation plan. Mortis and Scott (as cited in Al Hosni, 2017, p. 31) have warned that sloppy implementation of a new policy might not reflect the initial purpose of its policy maker. To keep the process on target, Mortis and Scott identified four effective strategies for policy implementation. The policy should (a) be vibrant and certain so everyone can understand; (b) have funds, capital, and resources for staff training and the implementation process; (c) be combined with a monitoring and evaluation plan to ensure goals and benchmarks are met; and (d) the implementation plan should be negotiated with representation from all affected stakeholders (Al Hosni, 2017, p. 31). Furthermore, the Education First Consulting and Grantmakers for Education (2011) stated "policy implementation is not a simple, linear endeavor... Indeed, what
constitutes “implementation” will vary depending on the specific issue, the surrounding circumstances, the political context and the actors engaged in the work” (p.11).

Policy implementation is best planned in phases and stages involving all stakeholders. Kotter (2012) identified eight stages of implementing change:

1. establishing a sense of urgency,
2. creating a guiding coalition,
3. developing a vision and strategy,
4. communicating the change vision,
5. empowering employees for broad-based action,
6. generating short-term wins,
7. consolidating gains and producing more change, and
8. anchoring new approaches in the culture.

Kotter’s (2012) eight stages of change implementation can be recognized within Wagner et al.’s (2006) work on change leadership. Wagner et al. (2006) posited three phases of whole-system change: (1) the preparing phase, (2) the envisioning phase, and (3) the enacting phase (pp. 133–134). To ensure fidelity to the proposed policy’s goals and implementation, Wagner et al.’s and Kotter’s systems for implementing systemic change were merged (see Figure 1)

Wagner et al. (2006) also identified three “change levers”—data, accountability, and relationships—that play key roles in the implementation of all three phases of change implementation (p. 134). To help leverage and to ensure a successful implementation, Wagner et al. recommended the three levers be incorporated into each of the three phases of implementation—preparing, envisioning, and enacting. In section six of this policy
advocacy document, Wagner et al.’s three levers will also be used as a framework for assessing if, when, and how well the policy is being introduced, envisioned, and enacted. The following are some examples of how the levers can be used in implementation:

1. **Data:** A survey is used to collect data from teachers, principals, district administrators, and parents about available and needed structures, systems, and training as well as the way all are monitored and supervised.

2. **Accountability:** Accountability is evident as community members and stakeholders develop deeper understandings of how achievement is measured, participate in setting goals, and support the change process.

3. **Relationships:** Relationships are strengthened as general education, special education, and bilingual/ELL teachers work together collaboratively. They attend professional development sessions and reflect on best practices to support ELLs. Patterns and systems are in place; lines of communication are robust; open and honest conversations are the norm.

According to Wagner et al. (2006), “when leaders begin owning these problems and taking responsibility for students’ achievement, they model a different and productive way of approaching problems” (p. 140).

Figure 1 depicts how aspects of the Wagner et al.’s and Kotter’s whole-system change models are combined to create a more comprehensive model and approach for introducing and implementing a system-wide policy change initiative.
Figure 1. Merging Wagner et al.’s (2006) and Kotter’s (2012) change systems.

**Phase One: Preparing**

In this phase of implementation, the policy advocates focus on building awareness by reaching out to different groups in the community and educating the whole district. When people feel something is urgent, they will take action. During this phase, we will be working with stakeholders who believe in the cause and the purpose of this proposed policy and will work on advocating with us. The policy advocates increase urgency by conducting several forums (Kotter, 2012). Then we will select a steering committee to serve, according to Wagner et al. (2006), as the guiding coalition that supports efforts to strengthen awareness of the policy advocacy document.

**Stage One: Establishing a Sense of Urgency**

In this stage, the policy advocates present gathered compelling data to “alert the status quo” (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 143) and inform various stakeholders to make sure that they understand the urgency of the policy change. The policy advocates conduct
four public forums and invite different stakeholders to attend. These groups will include: educators, teachers of ELLs, general education teachers, special education teachers, principals and school administrators, district administrators, parents, and local community members. At this time, the policy advocates contact agencies that act for quality and equity education for English learners to attend our forums. The forums will take place in public libraries, park districts, and community agency facilities. During these forums, the policy advocates present quantitative data related to the number of students affected by this policy through the years as well as qualitative data involving the stories of students and parents who were affected by the policy and the impact of this policy on the economy and society. The policy advocates will build relationships with parents and community members as well as administrators, teachers, and district and agency members advocating for students’ educational equity. The advocates will “initiate forms of accountability that require collective ownership of and taking responsibility for the system’s problem” (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 140). In this stage, the policy advocates will have different sign-in sheets for stakeholders to indicate if they are interested in advocating for the new English learners policy and joining one of the reviewing committee groups.

Stage Two: Creating the Guiding Coalition

After conducting the forums and collecting the sign-in sheets, the policy advocates will invite five to seven individuals who are interested in serving on small groups/committees. The role of these stakeholder representative groups is to review the policy and provide feedback based on their own perspectives. Next, the policy advocates will establish a kind of steering committee that includes representatives from all
stakeholders to review and finalize the advocated policy. The committee will be the guiding team throughout the process, lobbying for the new equitable and fair policy for ELLs, facilitating and communicating the future policy, and guiding its implantation. The role of this guiding coalition or steering committee is to meet frequently and navigate through the change process. In summary, this stage is where the researchers alert the public and create a coalition while collecting relevant data. In this stage, “data are employed creatively, compellingly, and strategically to focus the community’s attention on the children who are the heart of the work” (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 146).

**Implementation Timeline and Estimated Budget**

The timeline to implement this stage will be between the months of January and March. The four forums will be conducted throughout January up to mid-February. Each forum will last about 90 minutes to 2 hours. We will collect names and contact information from people who attend the forums and are interested in serving on one of the committees. These groups will review the proposed educational policy and provide feedback based on their perceptions and expertise. After establishing the committees, a guiding or steering committee will be created to support, educate, and advocate for the proposed policy. From mid-February through March, the researchers will train the steering committee members on how to facilitate meetings and discussions during the representatives’ group meetings.

The estimated budget for this stage would be approximately $2,000 to $3,000. This money will be used to inform the public by printing the informational facts, the announcement, the invitation letters, and paying for postal costs and advertisements. The venues used will for the most part be free of cost because they are public places. Cost for
water and refreshments will be minimal as well, and the committee meetings will only incur a slight cost.

**Phase Two: Envisioning**

The envisioning phase consists of creating a deeper and wider understanding of the urgency of the policy, more buy-ins and supporters, and communicating the vision in simple and concise ways for everyone to understand; “the time and energy required for effective vision communication are directly related to the clarity and simplicity of the message” (Kotter, 2012, p. 91). According to Wagner et al. (2006), to “envision whole-system change,” leaders need to identify actionable outcomes” (p. 145). The goal in this stage is to communicate the proposed policy to all stakeholders and create systems and structures to lay the groundwork for the implementation of the policy.

**Stage Three: Developing a Vision and Strategy**

Subsequently, the steering committee will start to meet with the community members of the small groups that have different representations: the parents’ group, teachers’ group, administrators’ group, and the district and agencies group. The steering committee will be trained by the policy advocates to facilitate the work and meetings of each group. During this time, these small groups will develop strategies to communicate the proposed policy to the people they represent. For example, the parent group will develop a strategy to communicate with other parents, using social media, word of mouth and using the community newspaper to convey the meeting times and spread the word.

**Stage Four: Communicating the Change Vision**

The steering committee, in this stage, will facilitate and ensure that the small groups’ communication and strategies are executed effectively to communicate the
proposed policy (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 148). While engaging in communicating the proposed policy, relational trust and respect also need to be wired because “the success of the improvement work depends on the quality of the conversations among individuals and groups” (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 149).

**Stage Five: Empowering Employees for Broad-Based Action**

Kotter (2012) explained that to empower employees and people who are going to implement the change, you need to have four components: “structure, training, systems and supervision” (p. 119) in place before moving on. To empower teachers, we need to ensure that they have the skills needed. In this stage, Kotter suggested removing barriers from the structures and building skills. Professional development around ELLs’ instruction and evaluation will be designed by the Division of ELLs. Having insufficient numbers of staff members who are qualified to instruct ELLs is another barrier that can be removed by hiring additional teachers. The schools and district would anticipate the required positions and work with universities to establish pipelines to fill the vacancies. Lack of instructional materials in the language of the ELLs can be solved by collaborating with other schools to share resources. Aligning the vision of the proposed policy to the district vision and creating systems of communications and disseminating information is an important action that the steering committee and the policy advocates need to accomplish during this envisioning phase.

**Implementation Timeline and Estimated Budget**

The timeline planned to implement the envisioning stage is the months of April through June. Throughout this time, the researchers along with the guiding coalition team will be working on deepening the understanding of the community members. There
will be monthly meetings with each representative small group. The researchers will conduct surveys to collect data during April and then using the results, they will work with the district’s ELL division to identify professional development needs and the number of required qualified teachers.

The estimated budget for this stage is approximately $5,000 to $6,000. This money will be used to collect the data, analyze the results, and pay for the after school teachers’ group collaborative meetings. The meeting supplies of the other groups will be covered in the budget.

**Phase Three: Enacting**

After communicating the vision and the strategies, we will recognize short-term gains to empower people and raise their commitments to collaborate and remove superficial obstacles that might arise, such as creating budgets and allocating financial resources for professional development workshops for teachers, obtaining curricular resources to enhance ELLs’ performance, and for extra instructional support (Kotter, 2012, p. 106).

**Stage Six: Generating Short-Term Wins**

During this stage, the policy advocates will identify a few short-term wins. Teachers are aware of how to instruct ELL effectively and grade them fairly using formative and performance assessments. As accountability increases and is shared, the collaboration between general education and ELL teachers to support ELLs will upsurge. The relationships among teachers will strengthen as will trust in school administrators who will hold teachers and themselves accountable for ELL achievement. ELL accomplishment is perceived as a shared accountability. The district administrators take
responsibility and present guidelines for providing equity and fairness systems for evaluating and assessing ELLs. Awareness around the needs of ELLs is built within the community and among parents.

**Stage Seven: Consolidating Gains and Producing More Change**

All teams in totality will work toward the same outcome. Many of the short-term goals will be accomplished and celebrated. This will help track the direction and progress of the policy’s implementation. When, implemented, the achievement of English learners will increase and we will have accurate measures of their performance. After attending the designated professional development workshops and collaborating together through learning, more teachers and school administrators will become capable in the way they service and meet the needs of ELLs.

**Stage Eight: Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture**

When the policy is implemented, the new mindsets and behaviors will bring equity to the grading policy and instructional style of the teachers. At the district level, the ELL division will invite general education and special education teachers to work alongside ELL teachers and attend workshops together. At the school level, general education teachers will meet frequently with special education teachers and ELL teachers to assess and advice one another on how to assess and instruct ELLs believing that “isolation is the enemy of improvement” (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 113). A culture of accountability is shared among teachers and school administrators when school principals collaborate and share resources to support the instruction and assessment of ELLs in their schools and neighboring schools.
Implementation Timeline and Estimated Budget

The third phase is planned to be implemented during the months of July through September. In October, the proposed policy will be presented to the district board for approval. The guiding coalition, the steering committee, along with focus group representatives will support the presentation and advocacy of the proposed policy during the board meeting. The estimated budget for this phase is approximately $300,000 to $500,000 based on the needs of the schools and the district’s professional development costs for teachers and administrators.
SECTION SIX: ASSESSMENT

Introduction

It will be the collective responsibility of all educators within the school district to implement the proposed ELL policy. In this section, we outline and describe the procedures, measures, assessments, and monitoring of the introduction, the planning, and the implementation of the new policy. Wagner et al.’s (2006) three phase change model and Kotter’s (2012) eight stage change model will be combined and used as the framework to guide the assessment of the policy and its implementation. The policy advocates believe that this merged model will ensure that the policy is well received, implemented, and sustained. The assessment plan outlines how the new policy will be assessed in the preparing, envisioning, and enacting phases of the rollout. Wagner’s three levers to facilitate change, data, shared accountability, and building relationships will be used to assess the Kotter change stages associated with each phase.

Assessing Phase One: Preparing

In Kotter’s (2012) eight stage change model, the first two stages in introducing change involves establishing a sense of urgency and building a guiding coalition for a new or proposed policy, practice, or procedure. First, to implement these first stages, the policy advocates will organize four stakeholder forums to raise a sense of urgency about rectifying the current unfair promotion and retention policy for ELLs that undermines educational equity and has long-term consequences for student academic failure. Second, the policy advocates will begin to build a guiding coalition, the steering committee, the team of people who will coordinate, guide, and communicate all aspects of the proposed policy with the goal of increasing the chances of attaining a higher level of ELL student
success. Steering committee membership will include the community, parents, administrators, and teachers, to assure that this coalition of stakeholders understand the importance of the policy and are willing to support it. The change levers and indicators applied to monitor and assess these first two stages are data, accountability, and relationship building.

Data

The policy advocates will instill the urgency of the instituting the new policy by using the quantitative and qualitative data that they have collected; their statistical analysis will deepen understanding of the need for urgency and build an army of supporters to assess the preparation phase.

To raise the sense of urgency, the quantitative data regarding the existing number of ELLs affected by the policy, the number of ELLs who met the general education program policy, and the practices of inequity related to the instruction of ELLs who were assessed in English without native language or ESL services will be presented to the community through four forums. The quantitative data collected at this stage are the number of participants in the four forums. It is important at this stage for the policy advocates to ensure that the out-reach announcements of the forums are strategically placed. The forums will be open to all community stakeholders and agencies that are interested in enhancing ELL education. Additionally, if needed, the policy advocates will hold additional forums in public places for various community members and interested agencies to attend. The same information will be presented to gain support for the new policy advocacy. Signatures of interested participants who would like to attend the focus
groups will be collected by the policy advocates during the establishing a sense of urgency stage.

During the build a guiding coalition stage, the policy advocates will convene a body of supporters who will coordinate, guide, and communicate all aspects of the new policy to the school community, district, and interested local agencies. The data needed in this stage are the information collected regarding the number of attendees interested in participating in our advocacy efforts. The policy advocates will make sure that all stakeholders understand how important their support is to the existence and implementation of this policy. To build a guiding coalition, we will enlist parents and community members, district administrators, principals and vice principals, and teachers of different specialties. Additionally, if any agency members outside of the education setting are willing to join, they will be welcomed. Five focus groups will be organized from this enlistment; and, from these five groups, a representative will be elected who will also be a member of the steering committee. These five groups will analyze, reflect, discuss, and give feedback. The representatives of the committees, who are also members of the steering committee, will come together to discuss the feedback and if required, make minor changes to the advocated policy. These meeting notes will be collected and used as qualitative data for assessing the level of urgency understanding of the community in this stage. The guiding coalition committee will prepare a factsheet that will be communicated to the community and its stakeholders.

Accountability

In the stage of rising urgency, educators and stakeholder believe that the learning of ELLs is the responsibility of all. A sense of we are all in this together, no “blame no
“shame” values are guiding the work. We need to move forward and work together to address the needs of ELLs. Leadership teams and district administrators understand the need for change “and agree to next steps for engaging a critical mass of shareholders . . . in understanding the problem” (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 144).

The steering committee members along with the policy advocates are finalizing the changes to the vision and the initiatives and help in communicating these to all of the stakeholders. The vision will be communicated via newsletters, e-mails, social media, letters sent home, meetings, and parent-teacher meetings. Translators will be provided for communication purposes and to assist in encouraging parents and community members to understand the urgency of this policy change.

**Relationships**

Indicators of built relationships in the preparing phase are measured by observing increases in both stages of phase one. In creating sense of urgency, school and district leadership teams apply the values and the norms of strong culture and relational trust such as no shame, no blame, and no excuses. All stakeholders express their commitment to support the change to ensure the effective improvement of ELLs’ education. During the forums, the policy advocates and stakeholders will identify, point to, and “address the dysfunctional relationships throughout the system” (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 145) so as to establish new ways of partnerships and collaborations.

In the next stage, the creation of the guiding coalition, the steering committee members along with the policy advocates will collaborate to form productive relationships based on trust and respect in an effort to attain the common goal. All agree
that communication should be clear and explicit, and facts on the achievement of ELLs should be shared and discussed.

**Assessing Phase Two: Envisioning**

Phase two, which is envisioning, encompasses the third, fourth, and fifth stages of Kotter’s (2012) change model. In stage three, the policy advocates will gather input from stakeholders that *creates a strategic vision and initiative*, depicting the desired impact and outcome of the policy thus creating a path linking the initiative to a future reality. In stage four, the policy advocates with support and assistance from stakeholders, will recruit administrators, teachers, and parents in an effort to *enlist a volunteer army* in support of the new policy. In stage five, the policy advocates will lobby district administrators to *enable action by removing barriers*. This may include distributing materials to educate teachers and administrators about new and emerging research in the ELL field. Another example of removing a barrier is increasing and enhancing communication with parents of ELL students. The change levers to be applied to monitor and assess phase two are data, accountability, and relationship building.

**Data**

The policy advocates will compile data from the surveys given to teachers, school administrators, district employees, and parents to ensure their perspectives are addressed in the vision and their concerns about educating ELLs are considered in the plan. The focus groups’ established norms will be collected to assess the patterns of relationships and the level of commitment.

Meeting notes will be collected from each focus group by the facilitators who are the steering committee members. These qualitative data will inform the policy advocates
on what the focus groups envision regarding the services for ELLs. ELL students and their parents share personal stories about how they struggle to succeed and how they figured their way out of failure. They share how the proposed promotion policy would affect them if they had the opportunity to experience it. The sharing will deepen the understanding of the urgency of the proposed policy and promote and help in enlisting an army of volunteers. For this enlistment, e-mails, social media, letters sent home, and meetings will be the modes of spreading the vision.

To assess the next stage, districts employees and school administrators will anticipate obstruction that might arise during the envisioning phase and plan to remove barriers to enable action in support of the advocated policy. Some of these barriers are the shortage of ELL teachers, general education teachers who are not experienced in teaching ELLs, administrators who are not aware of how to support ELLs, and parents of ELLs who speak languages other than English.

**Accountability**

Developing vision and strategy stage accountability is evident when the steering committee members communicate to their groups and report changes made to the finalized vision. All groups will reach out to the populations they represent: the teachers’ focus group will communicate the vision to the teachers; the school administrators’ focus group will communicate to their colleagues; and the parents and community focus group will be committed to communicating the vision and the benefits of this policy’s success to as many people as possible.

Accountability indicators to assess the vision communication and the empowering of employees for broader-based action are in evidence. The district is committed to
providing teachers with professional development opportunities that help in implementing effective instructions in classrooms having ELL students. School administrators are dedicated to generating different data reports on the progress of ELLs, creating guiding questions to communicate the vision to their staff, and providing teachers the time to observe and collaborate with each other.

The school administrators will provide translators to communicate the vision to the parents and to answer questions, if needed. Teachers who lack expertise in supporting ELLs are provided with professional opportunities to develop their skills and advance their instructional strategies to educate their ELL students effectively. At the same time, school administrators anticipate bilingual/ESL vacancies, budget for and allocate resources to hire the required teachers. The schools and the district will establish systems for periodically monitoring ELLs’ progress and achievement and communicate the plan to the community.

**Relationships**

During the developing a vision and strategy stage, the relationships among the policy advocates, the steering committee members, the focus groups, and the community members are strengthened by all agreeing on the importance of the policy change. As accountability is established and accepted among the stakeholders, the foundation of relational trust and respect is deepened and strengthen. The quality of conversations between the focus groups and the steering committee along with the policy advocates, is an indicator of trusting and respectful relationships.

In the communications in the change vision stage, relationships are strengthened and grow, trust is deepened, and the quality of the conversations increases. Stakeholders
are all engaged in honest conversations and collaborate to communicate the vision, discuss the problem, provide solutions, and work toward a common goal. To ensure that discussions are of high quality, the focus groups create norms that govern their work and guide their decision making.

When employees have the skills and the will to participate in collaborative discussions to support ELLs, they will become empowered to take action and reflect on their own practices so as to improve their instructional strategies. Teachers collaborate with each other and trust each other’s expertise in advising the teaching and learning of ELLs. Teachers are participating in professional development together to support each other and learn together how to instruct ELLs.

**Assessing Phase Three: Enacting**

In phase three, enacting, Kotter (2012) asserted that it is now time for stage six: *generating short-term wins.* This means recognizing, appreciating, and communicating peoples’ good work on behalf of the policy initiative. Public recognition helps to keep the policy initiative upfront, alive, and fresh in the minds of stakeholders. Public recognition can also serve as a means of assessing and gauging the implementation progress. Kotter’s stage seven, *sustaining acceleration and consolidating gains,* also in the enacting phase, recommended that stakeholders begin to press harder until the policy vision turns into a reality. There should be an urge to constantly improve and implement the new policy to help students achieve success.

Last, in stage eight, *anchoring new approaches in the culture,* Kotter stressed that for changes in policy, procedure, practice, attitude, or behavior to stick, they need to be recognized and acknowledged by stakeholders and school administrators as the district’s
operational “new normal.” This might be done by publically sharing the district’s ELL population’s progress under the new policy. The message to the entire community is that every student’s success is the district’s success. Change levers as indicators of a successful implementation of phase three are data, accountability, and relationship building.

Data

In the enacting phase, data will be collected on monitoring and assessing short-term wins, sustaining, accelerating, and consolidating gains, and gathering evidence of anchoring new approaches in the culture. The policy advocates will collect qualitative and quantitative data for the identifying short-term wins stage. The qualitative data will come from the teachers’ reflective logs. After participating in the district’s professional development activities and learning new practices, teachers will implement these practices in their classrooms, reflect on the effectiveness of the new strategies used, and evaluate their impact on ELLs’ learning. The other qualitative data will come from the meeting minutes of the ELL teachers and the general program teachers’ collaboration logs.

For stage seven, consolidating gains and consolidating more change, the data will be collected through district-wide learning walk-throughs to gather information on the quality of instruction at every grade level (Wagner et al., 2006) in the bilingual and ESL programs implemented in each school that has ELLs. To further enhance the instruction, grade level meetings are conducted monthly to discuss the effectiveness of various strategies based on the students’ performance data, then any necessary adjustments are made to the teaching and learning of ELLs. To monitor the progress of ELLs, school
administrators generate reports on ELLs’ course grades in reading and math and discuss these with teachers.

Anchoring new approaches in the culture is the last stage in phase three. The data are collected systematically for analysis and the monitoring of ELL students’ progress. The district collects data by generating successful schools’ reports to identify best practices. The district conducts walk-throughs to collect data on the quality of ELL instruction. The district will assess the effectiveness and quality of the schools by relying on different resources to measure students’ achievement and engagement (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 159).

**Accountability**

When the proposed policy is implemented, accountability will be evident through the behaviors of teachers, administrators, the Division of ELLs, and all district employees. All are enacting the proposed policy with fidelity. The three stages included in the enacting phase are generating short-term wins, consolidating gains and producing more change, and anchoring new approaches in the culture will be assessed at district and school levels.

At the district level, the ELL division will continue providing professional development opportunities to general education and special education teachers on how to work alongside with ELL teachers. Another strong indicator of district accountability towards improving ELLs learning and assessment is approving a budget for professional development that will build the capacity of all stakeholders: teachers, school administrators, and district employees who will be monitoring and providing the
institutional supports to schools during the implementation of the proposed policy and to parent and community members as well.

At the school level, anchoring new approaches in the culture is reflected in the attitude of teachers holding themselves and others accountable for the education of ELLs, and general education teachers and ESL teachers meeting frequently to assess and advise each other on how to grade and instruct ELLs. Teachers’ collaboration logs, quality of discussions and dialogues around ELL progress, and improved instructional and grading practices of ELLs are evident. Accountability in the enacting phase is measured by the results of the surveys, the meeting notes, and the continuous participation in district and out-of-district professional development workshops.

**Relationships**

Relationships are strengthened and deepened and they are evident through the different stages in the enacting phase. Indicators of relational trust in the enacting phase are: professional collaboration the commitment of schools to providing teachers with opportunities to peer observe each other and discuss instructional strategies to improve their practices. Educators and administrators “open up their practices among colleagues. . . . Parents and community members are welcomed into schools” (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 160) and remain engaged and involved in the policy advocacy initiative since its beginning.

**Reporting Systems**

The policy advocates suggest that two reporting systems be in place to establish credibility and accountability throughout the implementation process: one reporting system at the school level and a second reporting system at the district level. At the
school level, the administrators will generate ELLs’ progress reports every five weeks so as to be informed on the ELLs’ course grades in reading and math. Students’ progress reports will be discussed with the teachers and collaboratively they will identify next steps. Furthermore, the schools will create systems to monitor the instruction and evaluation of ELLs. If changes are needed in the instructional implementation or grading strategies, swift adjustments can be made at the moment or extra support can be provided to the ELLs. At the district level, the ELL division will generate quarterly reports on the ELLs’ course grades in reading and math. After analyzing the reports, the district will effectively advise the schools and ensure the advocated policy is being implemented with fidelity.

The steering committee will be accountable for updating the board’s decision and the monitoring process for all of the five committees. Additionally, the monitored progress should be reported to all stakeholders beyond the committees.

Kotter’s (2012) eight stage process is used to implement the new policy advocacy plan. Kotter’s steps give structure to the overall implementation process. This process defines the roles of the participants, board members, school administrators, teachers, and parents. An army of people are gathered to support and participate in implementing the process. Accountability is shared and perceived as a responsibility for ensuring educational equity. The assessments and grading system are evaluated and enhanced for all ELLs.
SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT

Introduction

In this section, we answer four questions that address why this advocated policy is the most appropriate and best policy for the district. The stakeholders’ values are honored in creating a vision and mission to improve equity and achievement of ELLs. This proposed policy addresses all stakeholders’ needs and concerns in order to gain a complete understanding and generate the support of all the people involved in implementing this policy. Once implemented, we believe this policy will benefit all stakeholders—the district and its schools, teachers, parents, and students.

What Makes This the Appropriate and Best Policy?

Under the current policy, ELL students who meet the general program criteria for promotion and retention are held to the ELLs’ promotion and retention policy that is based on only one measure, which is the average course grade in reading and math; therefore, ELLs are held to higher expectations. However, the same high expectations do not apply to the general program students whose promotion is determined by two measures, the course grade work in reading and math and the district’s standardized assessment. In addition, the current policy criteria provide three levels of course grades and the district’s standardized assessment. Conversely, all ELLs are treated as if all of them fit in one size, even though they have different needs, different English proficiency levels, and different schooling histories. Two remedies are proposed for the current policy. The first remedy is to take immediate corrective action and promote ELL students who met the district’s general education promotion criteria. In addition to being more just, doing this would protect the district from any lawsuits. The second remedy is
to use an additional performance measure to determine ELLs’ promotion or retention. In 2015 the chairperson of the board of education in the school district commanded an immediate corrective action and sent a memo to all elementary school administrators to promote ELLs who met the general program criteria. In 2018, the current promotion policy was revised to include that ELLs who meet the general education program promotion criteria are to be promoted to the next grade. However, there still is only one measure used to determine the promotion or the retention of ELLs.

The proposed policy encourages equitable promotion and recommends accurate measures of the performance of English language learners in elementary schools. The goal of this proposed policy is to provide different educational chances and equity for all English learners given their lower English proficiency levels and their need for bilingual/ESL services. Additionally, the advocated policy’s resolution is ensuring adequate assessment and accurate measures for English language learners’ academic performances, particularly when the assessments are in English. This proposed policy ensures accountability towards the education of English learners. If adopted, the advocated policy will bind the district and the schools to commit to providing high-quality educational opportunities for ELLs to access the curriculum before or during the school year and eliminate summer school and/or retention.

**What and Whose Values Are At the Center of the Policy?**

It is the policy advocates moral obligation to ensure that all students are learning regardless of their ethnic background. All stakeholders believe in equality and equity education for ELLs. By providing equity, students are given a chance to create a better future and, as educators, it is our duty to prepare our students to become productive
members of society. Parents value education; communities value contributors; and states desire skilled works. Therefore, it is an absolutely essential to ensure the learning of all students, even if this means doing whatever it takes to provide equity.

**Is the Implementation of the Policy Consistent With the Vision Behind It?**

The promotion policy is consistent with the policy’s vision. When implemented, ELLs who meet the general education promotion policy criteria will be treated as their peers in general education. Additionally, the district will use different methods to assess and evaluate ELL performance, such as the pivotal portfolios (Gottlieb & Nguyen, 2007) or performance assessments portfolios (Abedi, 2010). Different assessment methods will ensure having more than one data point to measure and evaluate ELLs’ achievement. Moreover, this proposed policy ensures that a student’s English language proficiency is assessed during the mandated time interval and taken into consideration when designing performance assessments tasks. Assessment results are shared with the parents, and all interventions provided to support the ELL student are discussed.

**Are the Needs and Concerns of All Stakeholders Addressed Sufficiently?**

The proposed policy concentrates on the needs of ELL students. The priority of this policy is to promote equity for ELLs. Parents are being educated about the new policy implementation and the effects of its implications. Additionally, community concerns regarding the retention of ELLs who did not acquire English language proficiency skills are addressed as well. District board and the ELL division are cooperating with the schools to assure proper implantation of the policy.
Final Thoughts

We believe if adopted and implemented, this policy would launch a beginning of educational and instructional reform for English language learners. This policy is only the first step that will lead to calls for other policy changes that will ensure an equitable education for English language learners at all levels. While conducting the needs analysis for this policy, we were surprised to discover the widespread lack of policies and guidelines across the U.S. that ensured equitable educational opportunities for English language learners. The policy advocates found few or no policies in place that focused on equitable grading and assessing ELLs’ knowledge of either general education or special education curricula, let alone access to, and opportunities to participate in gifted and advanced placement courses.
REFERENCES


