



from the office of Superintendent Robert Collins

What If? A Conversation About English Learners and the Achievement Gap

On Wednesday evening, the District English Language Advisory Council (DELAC) met and had an opportunity to discuss the achievement levels of English Learners and how they will be a critical element in our Strategic Plan to improve student achievement. We first looked at the data regarding English Learners and the necessary sense of



DELAC Leadership: Vice President Rafaela Zambrano, President Martha Gil, Secretary Carmen Lopez, and Parliamentarian Lorena Soto preside over the February DELAC meeting

urgency regarding the progress of these students. Sometimes I'm asked, "What's the problem?" The Achievement Gap data answers this question: 59% of 9th grade English-fluent students scored proficient or advanced proficient on the California Standards Test, compared to only 7% of English Learners. On the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE), 80% of all students passed the CAHSEE on their first attempt, compared to 36% of English Learners. English Learner results on the Academic Performance Index (API) are 586, which is 118 points behind the District average of 704. Finally, this data has to be seen in the context of English Learners who comprised 10% of our student enrollment in 2006-07. This is a number that continues to grow every year. Last night, we agreed on two top priorities: the **moral imperative** for the achievement of English Learners and the issue of **urgency**.

What Does the Research Tell Us?

Over the past weeks, our District has explored a variety of ways to increase the achievement of our English Learners. **Strategic, research-based and action-oriented** themes continue to surface in our discussions. These themes embody our **resolve** to:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <u>Understand how students acquire a 2nd language</u> ▪ <u>Develop and maintain supportive relationships</u> ▪ <u>Provide direct instruction in academic English across the curriculum</u> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <u>Provide explicit and contextual vocabulary instruction</u> ▪ <u>Establish both content and language goals</u> ▪ <u>Engage students in academic discourse</u> |
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WHAT IF?

1. **WHAT IF we personalized the learning environment for English Learners?** **We need to know our English Learners and their parents** and maximize our supportive student-teacher relationships.
2. **WHAT IF we utilized Professional Learning Communities to ensure rigor and relevance?** All of our *Professional Learning Communities* should analyze and discuss instructional strategies to address English Learners, emphasizing **language and content goals, academic English, content vocabulary, explicit reading and writing strategies** and opportunities for students to engage in **academic discourse**. One study of English Learners found that they only engaged in academic conversations for approximately three minutes per day.
3. **WHAT IF we concentrated support to intervene at the earliest point when a student is not making progress?** We want to *intervene* at the earliest point. School interventions can include: **supplemental reading classes, mandatory in-school CAHSEE preparation** beginning in the 9th grade, **learning centers** to provide in-school assistance, **credit recovery programs, mentorships and additional counseling supports**.

The parents and I will continue to work together to help our students succeed and to meet the expectations of our community. Implementing proven strategies across the curriculum to raise the achievement of our English Learners will have a **significant effect on CAHSEE and API** scores and will determine student, school, and District success. Our efforts over the coming months will be focused upon working with all teachers and DELAC in shaping a program that addresses the above issues and to seek additional funding to support these efforts.