

Comparing Attitudes and Practices Among California Educators Serving Different Proportions of English Learners

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For several years, WestEd's Measure to Learn and Improve (MLI) project team has kept California state policy leaders informed about the statewide implementation of the California Academic Standards in English language arts and mathematics, by summarizing and disseminating results from the RAND Corporation's annual American Educator Panel (AEP) surveys of teachers and principals.¹ This brief summarizes similarities and differences in the perceptions of California educators serving differing proportions of English learner (EL) students.

The implementation of new California Academic Standards in English language arts and mathematics in 2014/15 coincided with other statewide improvement efforts, including shifting to a more equitable Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and working to strengthen educators' levels of collaboration, data review, and inquiry into instruction (Grunow et al., 2018). While the uniform goal of the state's recent reforms has been to improve the academic performance of *all* California students, advances in instructional practice will be particularly important for students who have been identified to receive supplemental funding under LCFF — including English learner (EL) students, youth in the foster care system, and students eligible for

free or reduced-price meals (Koppich et al., 2018). The learning growth of EL students is a federal priority as well, with the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) mandating that all states' plans include it as an accountability indicator.

California is home to 1.3 million EL students, who, together, account for 21 percent of the statewide student population, with both the number of students and their percentage being the highest among all states in the nation (Santibañez & Umansky, 2018). In addition to asking questions on a variety of education topics, the May 2018 AEP surveys asked California teachers and principals to report the proportion of EL students in their classrooms or in their schools, respectively. While the authors acknowledge that EL students as a group are not monolithic, with individual students varying both in background and needs, this brief uses this teacher- and principal-level EL variable to draw some contrasts between the perceptions of California educators for whom EL students make up 25 percent or less of their student population with those for whom this student group accounts for more than 25 percent.

More frequent collaboration. California teachers and principals serving higher proportions of EL students generally reported more frequent collaborations with their peers (table 1). As shown, among teachers, the largest differences between the two groups of educators related to using data to make links between instruction and student outcomes, approaching an issue by looking at data, and drawing conclusions based on data.

Table 1. Percentage of California educators engaging in various collaborative activities at least monthly

<i>In our collaborative teams, we...</i>	Teachers with 25 percent or fewer EL students, by percentage (n = 311)	Teachers with more than 25 percent EL students, by percentage (n = 167)	Principals with 25 percent or fewer EL students, by percentage (n = 177)	Principals with more than 25 percent EL students, by percentage (n = 108)
Use data to make links between instruction and student outcomes.	47*	65*	63	69
Predict possible student outcomes when we consider changes in practice.	54*	65*	56	56
Draw conclusions based on data.	50*	65*	61	68
Approach an issue by looking at data.	47*	64*	60	63
Identify actionable solutions based on our conclusions.	53*	63*	59	62
Explore data by looking for patterns and trends.	46	54	58	57
Identify questions that we will seek to answer using data.	41*	53*	52	56
Identify additional data to offer a clearer picture of the issue.	39*	50*	51	54
Discuss our preconceived beliefs about an issue.	50	50	46	50
Revisit predictions made in previous meetings.	44	46	43	51

* p < 0.1

Additionally, on a separate survey question, the California principals with higher proportions of EL students in their schools reported that they looked at data more often to help inform their decisions and their feedback to staff — 55 percent reported doing so more than once a month versus 40 percent of principals serving lower shares of EL students. Principals serving a higher share of EL students also sought more time for collaboration. However, on yet a different question, they were less likely (by about 10 percentage points) than other principals to agree that their district provides them with adequate time in the school day to collaborate with peers.

Differing site leadership roles. California teachers with a higher share of EL students in their classrooms were more likely than teachers serving a lower proportion of EL students to report having a formal leadership role in their school (51 percent versus 42 percent, respectively). At the same time, California teachers in both groups tended to report similar levels of engagement from their principal around supporting instruction. However, teachers whose classrooms had a larger share of English learners were more likely to report that their principal “observes teachers teaching” and “clearly defines or helps teachers understand standards for instructional practices” (table 2).²

Table 2. Percentage of California teachers reporting key instructional support actions by their principal

<i>The principal in my school . . .</i>	Teachers with 25 percent or fewer EL students, by percentage (n = 311)	Teachers with more than 25 percent EL students, by percentage (n = 167)
Observes teachers teaching.	74*	84*
Empowers teachers to make decisions that improve teaching and learning.	78	77
Promotes the diagnosis of individual student learning needs.	70	65
Makes suggestions to improve teachers' classroom management.	62	62
Attends teacher planning meetings.	61	62
Clearly defines or helps teachers understand standards for instructional practices.	56*	66*
Gives teachers specific ideas for how to improve instruction.	57	60

* p < 0.1

Perhaps because they are in classrooms more often, the leaders of higher-EL schools were more cautious about the status of standards implementation in their education system. California principals serving higher shares of EL students were less likely to agree that their school (–21 percentage points), their district (–15 percentage points), and the state (–10 percentage points) were prepared to implement the California Academic Standards.

Supports for social and emotional learning. Fewer than one in five respondents in both teacher groups reported receiving pre-service training (i.e., during their teacher preparation program) on ways to help students acquire and apply social and emotional skills. More common was on-the-job (in-service) training in this area. Teachers in both groups were three times more likely to report having received in-service SEL training than pre-service SEL training (table 3).

In the May 2018 surveys California educators were also asked to select up to three strategies that would improve their ability to develop their students' social

and emotional skills. Teachers with differing shares of EL students reported different needs (table 4). Those with higher proportions of EL students more often identified the need for increased engagement from families, multi-tiered supports for different types of student needs, and ways to engage students in their own social and emotional development. In contrast, strategies such as additional time, educator self-care, and technical assistance were more often selected by teachers with lower shares of EL students.

On this same topic, responding principals saw their needs a bit differently than teachers. For example, regardless of the proportion of EL students in their school, California principals more often than teachers highlighted multi-tiered supports and adequate financial resources as key needs. Meanwhile, teachers more often than principals cited family engagement and explicit support from the school or district administration as needs (table 4).

Conclusion. California's 2015 framework for English language arts and development mandates that all EL students in California be provided

Table 3. Percentage of California teachers reporting that they received training on how to support students in acquiring and applying social and emotional skills

<i>I received training on how to support students in acquiring and applying social and emotional skills during . . .</i>	Teachers with 25 percent or fewer EL students, by percentage (n = 311)	Teachers with more than 25 percent EL students, by percentage (n = 167)
Pre-service training.	15	17
In-service training.	53	54

Table 4. Percentage of California educators who identified the listed activity, strategy, or resource among the top three most beneficial to developing the social and emotional skills of their students

Activity, strategy, or resource	Teachers with 25 percent or fewer EL students, by percentage (n = 311)	Teachers with more than 25 percent EL students, by percentage (n = 167)	Principals with 25 percent or fewer EL students, by percentage (n = 177)	Principals with more than 25 percent EL students, by percentage (n = 108)
Strategies for engaging students in their own social and emotional development	35*	46*	33	37
More engagement from parents and families	31*	44*	19	27
Strategies for delivering multi-tiered supports for different types of students' social and emotional needs	27*	36*	51	44
Strategies for incorporating social and emotional skill development into classroom curriculum	32	35	40	31
Time (e.g., for planning, collaboration with other teachers)	44*	31*	36	39
Strategies for fostering an environment to develop students' social and emotional skills	19	22	20	19
Explicit prioritization and support from school or district administration	22	20	9	12
Adequate financial resources or allocations in the budget to implement programs and practices	15	17	34	29
More knowledge of connections to existing resources and supports available through school, community groups, nonprofits, and government	13	16	15	12
Materials (e.g., curricula)	18	13	9*	16*
Strategies for educator self-care	12*	4*	11	10
Technical assistance support	2*	0*	3	3

* p < 0.1

with integrated English language development across content areas. Notably, on these May 2018 AEP surveys, California educators serving differing proportions of EL students generally espoused aligned views about their instructional materials and their professional development. But, as noted, the surveyed teachers and principals with higher shares of EL students reported collaborating more frequently. Survey results do not indicate why this is the case. Are the added monies that California's LCFF provides for its higher-EL schools being used to fund more peer-to-peer learning and collaboration? Does simply seeing a lot of students working hard to simultaneously master both academic content and the English language lead educators to work with one another more often? And what does effective professional collaboration look like in these differing contexts? Such questions are key for state, county, and district leaders in California to continue to grapple with as they strive to provide differentiated supports to meet the needs of schools, teachers, and learners across the Golden State.

References

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Endnotes

1 The RAND Corporation's American Educator Panel (AEP) surveys were originally launched in 2014 and are administered several times a year in more than 20 states. To create the panels, RAND first sampled 2,300 U.S. public schools, stratifying for balance by grade span (primary, middle, high, and combined), school size, poverty status, population density, and geographic region. Educators in California and several other states were over-sampled to afford state-level representativeness. Educators who change schools remain on the panel, and new members are added periodically so the panel remains representative over time. For the May 2018 administration of the AEP surveys, 492 of 879 California teachers (56 percent) and 300 of 1,056 California principals (28 percent) responded. The average margins of error for the results presented here thus generally range from ± 5 –8 percentage points. Subgroup analyses/cross-tabulations were carried out using the raw/unweighted counts of respondents, who were grouped according to whether they reported teaching/overseeing a student population with 25 percent or fewer EL students or more than 25 percent. Only statistically significant subgroup differences are presented in this brief.

2 In their recent paper, Santibañez and Umansky (2018) found that, overall across the state, EL students are disproportionately more likely than non-EL students to be taught by novice or early-career teachers.

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