

In this issue. . .

**IN THE NEWS:** News stories of interest this month.

**ELL UPDATE**

A CLOSER LOOK AT THREE DISTRICTS FROM THE RECENT THOMAS AND COLLIER STUDY ON ELLS: Two rural districts in Maine and an unidentified "District E" present some interesting conclusions about the current education of ELLs.

**JUST THE FACTS**

A GLOSSARY OF ELL TERMS: Some of the different terms the federal government and individual states use to define English language learners.

**FROM THE STATES**

DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS, DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: In some ways, Denver educates ELLs traditionally; in others, Denver seems to be leading the pack.

**AT ISSUE**

WHY IS NOPADOL FAILING SOCIAL STUDIES?: The difficulty of social studies for ELLs and the solutions that curriculum, pedagogy, materials, and assessment can provide.

**FROM THE FIELD**

SPEAKING OUT ON BEHALF OF ENGLISH LEARNERS: An interview with California Assemblyman Firebaugh.

~~ **IN THE NEWS** ~~

*Just cut and paste links into your browser to view stories.*

**St. Paul School May be First to Feature Hmong Curriculum**

*Star Tribune* (Minneapolis-St. Paul) - 1/20/03

Heavily Asian school acknowledges "significant population" with bilingual program

<http://www.startribune.com/stories/1557/3601991.html>

**State Board of Education Directs Department To Create Alternate Assessment For Limited English Proficiency Students**

Press Release, Michigan State Board of Education - 1/23/03

Michigan State Board of Education creates an alternative to state tests for ELLs

[http://www.michigan.gov/documents/LEP\\_News\\_Release\\_-\\_January\\_23,\\_2003\\_55919\\_7.doc](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/LEP_News_Release_-_January_23,_2003_55919_7.doc)

**Even after English Lesson, Foreign Kids Lag on Tests**

*The Miami Herald* - 1/31/03

Miami-Dade study finds that newcomers score better when tested in their native language even after redesignation

<http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/5070902.htm>

### **Lopez Walloped in School Recall Vote**

*The LA Times* - 2/5/03

Santa Ana school trustee defeated in recall election; accused of undermining Prop. 227 with waivers

<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/orange/la-me-nativo5feb05,0,2634251.story?coll=la%2Deditions%2Dorange>

### **Caucus: English Learners Cheated**

*The Sacramento Bee* - 2/6/03

California Assemblyman Firebaugh pushes to remove restrictions on funding for Spanish reading classes

<http://www.sacbee.com/content/news/education/story/6068985p-7025237c.html>

## ~~ ELL UPDATE ~~

### A CLOSER LOOK AT THREE DISTRICTS FROM THE RECENT THOMAS AND COLLIER STUDY ON ELLS

At first glance, Wayne Thomas and Virginia Collier's 350-page *A National Study of School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students' Long-Term Academic Achievement* hardly looks interesting. It may even look daunting with all the tiny, information-filled charts. But once you get past the opaqueness of the statistics and Thomas and Collier's unrelenting pursuit of accuracy and validity, this study reveals some important results as to the successful education of ELLs.

Conducted from 1996-2001 and published in August of 2002, the Thomas and Collier study focuses on five school districts and more than 210,000 student records. The full study reports on the effectiveness of eight major program models used to educate ELLs in urban and rural research sites in the northeast, northwest, south-central, and southeast United States. In this article, we look at two districts in the northeast and a district in the southeast, ending with a discussion of the national policy implications from the study which relate to these three districts.

### **Madawaska School Department and School Administrative District #24**

Located along the U.S. border with Canada, 350 miles north of Portland, Maine, Madawaska School Department and School Administrative District #24 are largely rural, serving a total population of only 4,000 to 5,000 each. Ninety percent of the students in the two districts are of Franco-American heritage, with varying degrees of proficiency in English and French.

In contrast to what one might assume of English language learners, the students from these two districts reported their ability to speak English as high and their ability to speak French as moderately low. In fact, "As a group, just before the program began, these students scored at the 40<sup>th</sup> NCE (31<sup>st</sup> percentile) in English reading and mathematics. In other states with LEP students, often the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile (45<sup>th</sup> NCE) is the level at which students are reclassified as fluent in English and ready for the mainstream" (Thomas and Collier, 73). (Thomas and Collier use both percentiles and NCEs (normal curve equivalents) in reporting their research. Both are measures of relative achievement in comparison with a norming group. A percentile,

however, is a rank score, meaning that the difference between two consecutive percentiles can change, depending on where the percentiles are in the normal distribution. NCEs represent a valid statistical transformation of percentiles that produces a scale with differences that are equal in size. NCEs allow comparison of scores from different norm-referenced tests, and their use is specified in federal education regulations.)

The caveat comes when considering the achievement of these bilingual students in comparison to a group of high-achieving francophone students: the 900 students chosen for this program performed markedly lower. The overall purpose for using a 50/50 one-way developmental bilingual education model was then to “focus on restoration of a minority language. . . as a means to promoting higher academic achievement. . . eventually leading to economic revitalization of the region” (Thomas and Collier, 53). In these very northern parts of Maine, even with French-speaking Canada much closer than the more economically developed southern areas of the state, French is seen for the most part as the inferior language of the lower classes. The language that should have been a method for encouraging economic development and cultural pride was instead something to be ashamed of. The development of a 50-50 balance of English and French in a bilingual education classroom was meant to encourage pride in native language and community, while fostering academic achievement in English, the dominant language of the region.

Five years after implementation, compared to the students being schooled monolingually (i.e., in the mainstream English language classroom), “the students being schooled through their two heritage languages, French and English, are achieving at higher levels than their monolingually schooled peers, and they are adding French to their knowledge base” (Thomas and Collier, 74). During the first four years of the program, the students in the study went from the 40<sup>th</sup> NCE to the 62<sup>nd</sup> NCE in reading achievement. A parent of a student in the program speaks anecdotally of the program’s results: “It’s a fantastic program! We have no regrets of putting her in the program because she has picked up so much. Kristin reads and writes French very well. She’s at the top of her class. Even in math concepts in French, she picks it up like a sponge. . . and it has not bothered her English” (Thomas and Collier, 60).

## **District E**

As part of this study, districts that were researched by Thomas and Collier could chose to remain anonymous; in the case of District E, school administrators chose this option. What we do know is that District E is located in the southeastern part of the U.S., with approximately 4,600 ELLs. ELLs in ESL/bilingual programs make up roughly 25% of the student population. Seventy-two percent of these ELLs are Spanish-speaking. According to the most recent data available (from the year 1994), 25% of these Hispanic ELLs have interrupted prior schooling or are newcomers to the U.S., and tested very low in both English and Spanish proficiency.

In order to decrease the achievement gap between whites and minorities, District E has made a strong commitment to increasing the academic achievement of all students. The district had offered ESL pullout classes (where an ESL teacher works with ELLs outside the mainstream classroom for a certain portion of the day) since 1975. In the early 1980s, the program was restructured to teach English through content, as opposed to focusing on just English language development. While this study was being conducted, District E introduced a one-way bilingual program to

help Spanish-speaking ELLs, specifically those with limited or interrupted former schooling. However, because these ELLs had not yet been tested on a nationally normed test, information for District E's one-way bilingual program was not included in the report.

As was true of the teachers in the two Maine districts, ESL teachers in District E are highly qualified: all are ESL certified and two-thirds have masters degrees. The ESL content program in District E is "carefully conceived" and "the achievement levels that these ESL Content graduates reach (mid 30s in NCEs) are high in comparison to many other school districts utilizing ESL content" (Thomas and Collier, 281 and 282).

### **What Do Results From These Three Districts Mean?**

Two of Thomas and Collier's "Major Policy Implications" are related to the three districts discussed above, and worth noting:

1. "Enrichment 90-10 and 50-50 one-way and two-way developmental bilingual education (DBE) programs (or dual language, bilingual immersion) are the only programs we have found to date that assist students to fully reach the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile in both L1 and L2 in all subjects and to maintain that level of high achievement, or reach high levels through the end of schooling. The fewest dropouts come from these programs" (Thomas and Collier, 7). That is to say, NOT all bilingual education programs are successful in schooling ELLs. According to Thomas and Collier, two-way developmental bilingual education is most successful. The transitional bilingual education programs offered in most districts in the country are generally shorter than the four to seven years recommended by Thomas and Collier. The well-documented shortages of qualified bilingual teachers also affects the success of many transitional bilingual programs.
2. "Bilingual/ESL Content programs must be effective (at least 3-4 NCE gains per year more than mainstream students are gaining per year), well implemented, not segregated, and sustained long enough (5-6 years) for the typical 25 NCE achievement gap between ELLs and native-English speakers to be closed. Even the most effective programs can only close half of the achievement gap in 2-3 years, the typical length of remedial ELL programs" (Thomas and Collier, 8). If typical ELL programs are provided for only two to three years, ELLs bring this achievement gap to mainstream classrooms after being transitioned. If content is not included in ESL classrooms, this achievement gap will not be reduced at all, presenting even more of a problem once ELLs are mainstreamed.

Perhaps most importantly, Thomas and Collier state that "the strongest predictor of L2 [second language] student achievement is amount of formal L1 [primary language] schooling. The more L1 grade-level schooling, the higher L2 achievement" (Thomas and Collier, 7). As revealed in the study of District E, ELLs with limited or interrupted former schooling have the largest achievement gap of any group of second language learners. Not coincidentally, those ELLs need the most extra support or additional programs to even come close to catching up.

## A GLOSSARY OF ELL TERMS

*Navigating the sea of acronyms and terminology that describe ELLs can be confusing. Here are a few of the commonly used terms with some of the areas of the country the terms are used.*

- **English Language Learner** (ELL) – used increasingly across the United States to refer to a student who is learning the English language; used interchangeably with LEP
- **Limited English Proficient** (LEP) – used in *No Child Left Behind*, and by the federal government in general, to refer to students who have insufficient knowledge of the English language to participate in the mainstream English language classroom; used interchangeably with ELL, but often seen negatively as students are termed “limited;” was replaced by ELs as the term of choice for California; also used in Georgia, New York, and Washington
- **Fluent-English-Proficient** (FEP) – ELLs who have been redesignated or reclassified into the mainstream English classroom; redesignation to FEP usually signifies the end to federal and state funding of ESL/bilingual programs
- **Language Enriched Pupils** (LEP) – term used by the Florida Department of Education to describe ELLs; an alternative to LEP, or “limited English proficient”
- **Language minority** (LM) – any student who speaks a language other than English as a native language or at home; used as an inclusive term for ELLs, ELLs who have transitioned to the mainstream classroom, and students whose native language is not English, but who are not ELLs
- **English Learner** (EL) – a term used almost exclusively in California for students who lack English language skills; replaced LEP as the most commonly used term for these students in California

### ~~ FROM THE STATES ~~

#### DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS, DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

The Denver Department of English Language Acquisition, started in June 1999, develops, monitors, and reviews educational systems for ELLs in the Denver Public Schools. The main goal of the department is to “use efficient and effective techniques to provide students with the English language skills they need to meaningfully participate in the mainstream English language instructional program. Transition to English begins when students enter the program” (Denver Public Schools, “ELA Program Overview”). Although ELL policy in Denver is similar to policy in other districts in its use of a combination of transitional bilingual education and content-based ESL, it is considerably different in that Denver also offers a one-year, structured transition program for ELLs in mainstream classrooms.

As of the 2001-2002 school year, 16,580 ELLs were enrolled in Denver schools. Roughly 93% of these students speak Spanish as a primary language. ELLs that have

been exited from English language acquisition programs in Denver historically have not performed as well as native speakers of English; but they have continued to decrease the achievement gap, especially in recent years (Denver Public Schools, "English Language Acquisition Program Annual October Report").

### **ELA-S, ELA-E, and ELA-T**

ELLs in Denver Public Schools "traditionally progress from native language instruction (if provided), to supported English content instruction, to mainstream English language classrooms taught by transition teachers with the opportunity for English language development support, and finally, to mainstream English language classrooms. Students in transition or mainstream English language classrooms may receive additional support through English language development or an English language transition course" (Denver Public Schools, "English Language Acquisition Program"). This model follows guidelines set out by the Colorado State Board of Education in the *English Language Proficiency Act*.

Specifically, ELLs in Denver schools can be taught English through four different program models:

1. **English Language Acquisition – Spanish** (ELA-S) -- Transitional native language instruction (TNLI) is offered in Spanish along with English language development classes with increasing amounts of sheltered English content instruction.
2. **English Language Acquisition – English** (ELA-E) -- ELLs are offered English language development, more commonly known as ESL, along with supported, sheltered content instruction in English.
3. **Newcomer Centers** -- Located at one middle school and one high school in the district, newcomer centers serve ELLs for one or two semesters who have limited or interrupted education to get them ready for an ESL program. Spanish language support is provided when appropriate.
4. **The Mainstream Classroom** -- Parents have the option of enrolling their children in mainstream classrooms without any special language learning support.

Once ELLs are officially transitioned from the English Acquisition program, they are monitored for one year by specially trained teachers in mainstream English language classrooms (Denver calls this ELA-T). If they start to struggle with their English, they can be reassigned to an ELA-E program.

### **Teacher Training**

ELL teachers in Denver are required to undergo lengthy and specific training whether they teach in bilingual, ESL, or transition classrooms. In addition to state licensure, ELL teachers must undergo 60 or 150 hours of district training, depending on which category they fall into. Specifically:

- Teachers who are designated **ELA-S**, and are responsible for instruction in Spanish literacy and content areas, are required to pass a Spanish language proficiency exam and complete 150 hours of training.
- Teachers who are designated **ELA-E**, and are teaching in ESL classrooms, must also complete 150 hours of training.

- Teachers who are designated **ELA-T**, and are assigned to help those ELLs for the first year after they have been transitioned from the English language acquisition program, are required to complete 60 hours of training.

Some of the modules that are covered during ELL teacher training for ELA-S, ELA-E, and ELA-T teachers include "Instructional Issues in Second Language Acquisition," "Supported English Content Instruction (SECI)," and "English Language Development (ELD)" (Denver Public Schools, "ELA Module Training Guidelines for 2002-2003").

### **Curriculum/Educational Materials**

Unlike some programs for ELLs in the United States, Denver teaches subject area content at the same time as the traditional English language development components (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in both ELA-S and ELA-E programs. Accordingly, "the curriculum for English language learners will be the same as that used for the mainstream English language instructional program. Appropriate instructional strategies are used to make the curriculum accessible" (Denver Public Schools, "English Language Acquisition Program," 32). In ELA-S classrooms, Denver tries to find Spanish materials that parallel English subject area materials. In ELA-E classrooms, teachers combine the use of English language development materials with mainstream subject area materials adapted by teachers.

~~ **AT ISSUE** ~~

### WHY IS NOPADOL FAILING SOCIAL STUDIES?

**By Suzanne Irujo**

*ELL Outlook* Staff Writer

Nopadol sits in his U.S. History class in a Catholic high school in Virginia, trying to understand what the teacher is saying, copying the outline the teacher has written on the board, and adding information to it, all at the same time. Most of the time all he can do is copy the outline. Realizing that he can't write and understand at the same time, Nopadol stops writing and just listens, hoping to be able to copy a classmate's notes later. When he fails to do this, he tries to get the information from his textbook, but it takes him four times as long to read the material as it would take a native speaker of English, and he has five other classes to prepare for. It's easy for him to get discouraged, since he has failed six of the seven history quizzes that he's taken so far this year (Adamson, 1993).

Adamson's case study of an English language learner (ELL) in a mainstream social studies class provides reveals that Nopadol had many academic advantages that not all ELLs have. His education in Cambodia was very rigorous, and he does well in his math and science classes. He actively uses learning strategies, and monitors their effectiveness. His teacher has experience with ESL students, and tutors him individually outside of class. He has many American friends, and one in particular with whom he studies. He is motivated to do well, and wants to go to college to study electrical engineering. *Why is he at risk of failing his U.S. History class in spite of all these advantages?*

### **What Makes Social Studies so Difficult for ELLs?**

One reason why ELLs have such a difficult time mastering social studies content is because it is the most language-intensive of any subject. Social studies concepts are more abstract than mathematics or science concepts, and must often be explained rather than demonstrated. But just understanding the concepts is not enough; to understand social studies, you must understand the concepts in relation to other concepts. This can be very difficult when you haven't fully mastered the language in which these relationships are explained.

Consider the ways in which language expresses cause/effect, comparison/contrast, sequence, definition, generalization/example, and so forth. We can teach ELLs to recognize that the word *because* usually signals the effect, but how can we teach them to recognize the cause and effect relationship in a sentence such as *Columbus had read about Marco Polo and believed he could reach Asia*? The discourse markers that signal these relationships are difficult to acquire, and the large number of synonymous markers in English makes it an even harder task (Short, 1993).

The other major reason why social studies is difficult for ELLs is that it is dependent on a lot of background knowledge that is culture-specific, and thus unknown to most ELLs. Native English speakers have been acquiring this knowledge since before they began school. Somehow ELLs have to catch up with that, and they have to do it while the native speakers continue acquiring more knowledge. This is not just a question of learning names, dates, events, traditions, and so forth. Many social studies concepts, such as *democracy* or *representation*, are culturally defined. They may have very different perceived meanings for students from other cultures (Hernández, 1997). Even such seemingly simple things as the meanings of abbreviations can cause trouble for ELLs. Nopadol did not know what *VP* meant, and he thought *Gov.* meant government.

### **The Issue**

There is a very serious issue here. Inability to succeed in the social studies classroom is impeding ELLs' overall academic success. In elementary school they may be retained because they can't pass social studies classes; in high school they may be denied graduation because they can't pass U.S. history classes. The issue is being addressed through native language classes in many places, but only 22.7% of ELLs receive instruction in their native languages (NCELA, *Survey of the States' Limited English Proficient Educational Programs and Services 2000-2001 Summary Report*). Sheltered instruction classes are helpful, but are not offered in many places; in addition, sheltered instruction classes are not as effective as they could be because of lack of teacher training and appropriate materials. And there are millions of ELLs who receive all their social studies instruction in mainstream classrooms, where fewer than one-third of their teachers have received any training in teaching them (National Center for Education Statistics, *1993-1994 Schools and Staffing Survey*).

### **Is There a Solution?**

Let's look at the challenge of improving the performance of ELLs in social studies classes from several perspectives: the content of the curriculum, pedagogy, materials, and assessment.

**Curriculum:** As in all content areas, current standards for social studies include an emphasis on covering less information but in greater depth. For ELLs, the focus should be on essential concepts only—the "big ideas" of social studies. Because of their lack of background knowledge, ELLs need more time to build understanding of key concepts.

They should begin with basic, familiar concepts, and gradually develop related ideas. A flexible curriculum, based on integrated multicultural thematic units, can facilitate this (Anstrom, 1999).

**Pedagogy:** Social studies is a subject in which it is particularly important for ELLs that pedagogy be interactive and based on multi-sensory input. The acquisition of social studies knowledge cannot be dependent on listening and reading. As we saw in the case study of Nopadol, it is impossible for students with limited English proficiency to understand a lecture and take notes on it at the same time. It is also very difficult for them to assimilate concepts from reading a text when deciphering that text takes them many hours. Activities such as cooperative learning, group problem solving, and role-playing can provide the interaction that ELLs need, and at the same time facilitate the development of different points of view. Videos, cassettes, maps, and visuals help overcome language difficulties and also address individual learning styles (Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 1996).

**Materials:** Even the most effective pedagogy is hampered by a lack of materials to support it. For ELLs to succeed in social studies classes, it is essential that they have access to materials that:

- Reduce the reading load by simplifying the syntax, eliminating structures such as multiple embeddings, passives, and unclear referents
- Increase the comprehensibility redundancy of the readings through multiple restatements, repetitions, and summaries
- Teach new vocabulary through explanations, discussions, and opportunities for use, not just definitions
- Facilitate interaction
- Include visuals that convey concepts and facilitate understanding, not simply illustrate concepts that are presented in the text
- Incorporate learning strategies and explicit teaching of discourse markers
- Provide a variety of genres on the same topic

Sample materials that incorporate many of these features have been produced as part of a research study entitled *Integrating Language and Culture in Middle School History Classes* (Short, 1993, 1994). Both the complete study and a short summary of it can be downloaded from the Web, and the materials are available for purchase from the Center for Applied Linguistics.

**Assessment:** *No Child Left Behind* does not mandate annual testing for social studies, as it does for English reading/language arts, mathematics, and science (Section 1111(b)(3)(A)). This is good news and bad news. The bad news is that school systems may put less emphasis on achievement in social studies because it is not a component of "Adequate Yearly Progress." The good news is that this will allow states, districts, schools, and teachers to develop their own more authentic ways of assessing social studies. For ELLs, this should include having them perform a variety of authentic tasks similar to those used to teach. Traditional multiple-choice tests pose difficulties because of ELLs' much slower reading speed. In addition, unknown vocabulary or complex syntax can prevent ELLs from understanding what the question is, even when they might know the answer. Short essay tests can be a good means of assessing an ELL's understanding of social studies concepts if the evaluation focuses on content and not form. Nopadol did better on short essay questions than on matching or multiple choice questions, because in an essay he was in control of the syntax and vocabulary.

## Conclusion

We will never be able to make social studies courses easy for Nopadol and others like him, because we will never be able to totally eliminate the linguistic and cultural barriers that are inherent in social studies content. However, through increased availability of native language and sheltered content classes, curriculum reform, training of mainstream teachers, and appropriate materials, we can give these learners a chance to succeed.

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## ~~ FROM THE FIELD ~~

### SPEAKING OUT ON BEHALF OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

#### **By Michelle Adam**

*ELL Outlook Staff Writer*

California Assemblyman Marco Antonio Firebaugh has been waging a battle on behalf of English Learners in his state. This past fall, he introduced two specific legislative bills—AB 741 and AB 2363—intended to improve the quality of teaching, curriculum, and assessment that English Learners receive in California.

“California has been failing our non-English speaking kids,” said Firebaugh, who is also chair of the Latino Legislative Caucus and majority floor leader of the California State Assembly. “They don’t perform as well as other kids on standardized tests. They don’t graduate in numbers commensurate with their percentage in our school population; they don’t go to college anywhere near the percentage of their population in the school districts. We need to do better.”

Firebaugh’s two bills passed California’s Senate and Assembly, but in the face of large budgetary shortfalls were ultimately vetoed by Governor Gray Davis. “The governor indicated that he was concerned about the budgetary implications. I think he would have signed the bill in a different economic climate,” said Firebaugh.

AB 741 was intended to address California’s 1.5 million English Learners (82 percent of whom are Spanish-speaking), who make up one quarter of the state’s total student enrollment. If passed, it would have required that the state annually assess these students’ English language development, and would have held the state accountable for their progress by including them as a subgroup of California’s prime measurement of school performance, the Academic Performance Index (API). (The California English Language Development Test, established to measure the success of ELs, has not yet been fully implemented due to budgetary constraints, said Firebaugh. He would like to see it fully implemented and included as a part of the API.)

“We have adopted new standards for all of our school kids in California—new methodologies, frameworks, textbooks, and new standards—but we have failed to do

this for English Learner kids. We have a system of standardized tests that we put our kids through and we judge schools based on how kids perform on the tests. For EL kids, districts may exclude EL students if they are in certain categories—if they are new to a school system or their mastery of English is not sufficient enough,” said Firebaugh. “A school system could completely fail to teach EL kids and they would not be penalized when we consider the school’s success in terms of the API.”

AB 741 also required that instructional materials address the needs of English Learners and that they be aligned with state adopted academic standards and content standards. Firebaugh described the books currently being used by the state as “old materials.” While California has already agreed to purchase new materials that are aligned with state standards, the money has yet to be allocated for this. “We have recognized the need to do this. I am simply saying let’s do it. This is an expensive endeavor, but one that we ought to make room for in our budget to achieve now,” said Firebaugh.

Currently, under California’s Proposition 227, EL students are required to transfer from intensive sheltered English immersion classes into mainstream classes within a year. This, according to Firebaugh, “is shortsighted and Draconian. I think it has worked to the detriment to a whole lot of our kids.”

Firebaugh’s bill would have required that EL students be mainstreamed once they master academic content as well as basic skill requirements. “We should teach our kids language, but not at the exclusion of content,” he said. “I was suggesting that students progress in subject areas other than language acquisition and do so in their native language. At the same time we can focus on language acquisition, and within a reasonable time students can transition to English-only instruction.”

In terms of textbooks, Firebaugh believes “we ought to have materials that are appropriate for other subject areas that are aligned to our new standards. We should offer our kids materials that are subject-matter specific and in their native language.”

Another Firebaugh bill vetoed by Governor Davis, although passed through the state legislature, was AB 2363. This bill would have required that the 11-member State Board of Education be comprised of a diverse body, representative of the needs of parents, teachers, and students. AB 2363 outlined the need to have at least two members of the general public with expertise in the research, methodology, and practice of teaching English Learners, among others.

“The governor was wrong in his determination. He was concerned about a limitation of his authority,” said Firebaugh. “He hasn’t appointed anyone who understands the needs of EL students. I think that this is a great failing on the part of our Board of Education. I intend to revisit this issue. My ultimate goal is to see a board that takes into consideration the needs of EL kids.”

While the governor vetoed both of Firebaugh’s bills, the Assemblyman is committed to introducing new legislation during this next month. “I think there are many reasons why anyone should be concerned and focused on the success of ELs. Anyone paying attention to the demographics of California, anyone who has a sense of the diversity of our state, has to be paying attention to ELS,” he said.

Firebaugh represents the Southeast Los Angeles area, which he describes as comprised of a large percentage of Latinos who speak Spanish at home and are exposed to "English when they first arrive at the school site." In his neighborhood of South Gate, "50 percent of the kids aren't graduating from high school," he said.

Like many in his neighborhood, Firebaugh himself was an immigrant, arriving here from Mexico at four years of age. "These kids back in my neighborhood are me three decades ago and they are the future of our state," said Firebaugh. "Failure to effectively teach English Learners will be a great lost opportunity for California. I see in them great engines of progress for our state."

*The opinions expressed in "From the Field" do not necessarily represent those of Course Crafters, Inc.*

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