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**Report to the New York City Department of Education,
Office of English Language Learners**

PILOT STUDY
Meeting the Needs of Long-Term English Language Learners in High School
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Summary

Long-term English language learners are defined in this study as English language learners (ELLs) who have been in the United States for six years or more. In New York City, 12.8% of all ELLs are long-term ELLs. We conducted a descriptive, qualitative study in three New York City high schools serving long-term ELLs (LTELLs) to identify the characteristics of LTELLs and their educational needs in high school. The first high school is a medium-sized vocational school in the Bronx, the second is a small high school in Manhattan where all of the students are Spanish-speaking ELLs, and the third is a large and diverse traditional high school in Queens. At all three schools, LTELLs are integrated with other ELLs, and no services specifically tailored to their needs are being provided. At Schools 1 and 3, LTELLs receive English as a second language (ESL) programming and/or bilingual education, with the majority only receiving ESL, and LTELLs often take foreign language courses in their native language as well. At School 2, all students are enrolled in bilingual education in Spanish and English, and the school seeks to promote biliteracy by teaching literacy across content subjects. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 29 LTELLs, five administrators, and four teachers from January-June, 2007.

The students in our sample range in age from 12-19 years old. Most of the students speak Spanish in addition to English, though some students speak other minority languages such as Chinese and Twi. Based on our findings, we have identified the following categories of students based on their past educational experiences:

- ***Vaivén***
Students who are transnational, moving back and forth between the U.S. and their country of origin, and attending school in both countries. Some *vaivén* students have missed several grades.
- **Inconsistent U.S. Schooling**
Inconsistency as a result of enrolling in many schools, attending schools with inconsistent language policies, a lack of K-12 coherence in programming, and/or gaps in students' receipt of language support services altogether. These students have moved in and out of bilingual education, English as a second language, and mainstream classrooms.
- **Transitioning**
Students who will soon exit ELL status, but who just needed a bit of extra time to do so; these students overall perform better in school than others in the sample, and many have only been in the U.S. for six years.

The first two groups of students are by far the most prevalent in our sample. Fewer than half of the students in our sample are U.S.-born, with the remainder born in their country of origin; of U.S.-born LTELLs, the majority are *vaivén*. Thus LTELLs are defined by inconsistencies in their past schooling. These complications are compounded by insufficient and inaccurate data in schools about LTELLs, and we suspect schools are over- or under-estimating how many LTELLs they serve.

Half of the students come from homes where only their native language is spoken, while half come from homes where that language is spoken in addition to English. The students are orally proficient in English and their native language, often sounding like native speakers of both.

However, LTELLs are characterized by limited levels of literacy in either language as a result of past inconsistencies in schooling and educational programs which have not developed the students' native language literacy skills. In the past, LTELLs have attended U.S. schools which primarily emphasized English acquisition, having been enrolled in English-only programs (ESL and mainstream) and 'weak' forms of bilingual education. As a result, and in spite of their oral bilingualism, LTELL students report that they prefer to read and write in English; at the same time, however, reading and writing in English is also cited as the greatest challenge LTELLs face in school.

High schools are generally not prepared to meet the needs of these students; in high school, LTELLs attend ESL courses intended for new arrivals to the U.S., and foreign language courses in their native language that were intended for native speakers of English. As a group, the average cumulative grade point average of the LTELLs in our sample in high school is 69.2% or a D+. Overall school performance is low, with poor grades and grade retention commonplace, making this population at high risk of educational failure. In light of our findings from this preliminary study, we recommend the following:

- LTELLs should be defined as ELLs who have attended school in the United States for seven years or more.
- High school programs need to teach academic literacy skills explicitly in both English and the students' native languages. Native Language Arts should be offered to LTELLs, which focus on native language literacy development. Explicit literacy instruction must also be infused into all content-area subjects, such as Math, Science, and Social Studies, in addition to ESL and heritage or native language classes. A school's approach to literacy instruction must be uniform and coordinated across all subject areas.
- All secondary teachers working with ELLs, and content-area teachers in particular, should receive professional development on how to integrate explicit literacy instruction aimed at LTELLs into their classes.
- LTELLs need to experience greater consistency in program enrollment, and movement in and out of bilingual education programs, ESL programs, and mainstream classrooms should be discouraged. When ELL students move from one school to another, they should only be placed into a school with a similar program to that in which they were previously enrolled.
- Parents and guardians of ELLs need to be informed of the deleterious effects of inconsistent programming.
- Schools must be required to adopt and adhere to clear, coherent schoolwide language policies, so they are able to provide their ELLs with consistent and constant programming.

- Developmental bilingual education programs which promote bilingualism and biliteracy should be promoted in grades K-12, particularly in middle schools, with course materials also available in students' native languages.
- Schools need more accurate data about their LTELL population so that they can do a better job both placing and serving them. To help with this, we propose the use of the intake template presented in Appendix D to aid in the identification of LTELLs.

Introduction

Within the current era of *No Child Left Behind*, all students are required to perform to high standards on assessments which demand strong literacy skills and academic language proficiency. This is posing great challenges for English language learners (ELLs) in high school, who consistently score far below native-English speakers on tests of language arts as well as other content-area subjects (Escamilla, Mahon, Riley-Bernal, & Rutledge, 2003; Valenzuela, 2005), and who are overrepresented in rates of dropout and grade retention as a result (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2000; Menken, in press; Ruiz de Velasco, 2005; Valencia & Villarreal, 2005). Long-term ELLs are defined in this study as students who have been classified as English language learners for six years or more, and continue to require language support services in school. In high school, these students are disproportionately likely to experience educational failure.

While there are significant numbers of Long-Term English Language Learners (LTELLs) in the New York City public schools, comprising 12.8% of all English language learners (New York City Department of Education, 2007), very little research has been conducted about these students. Yet the needs of long-term English language learners in school are different from those of other ELLs, as detailed in this report. For this reason, it is of pressing concern to better understand this student population so that the challenges they face can be addressed through appropriate educational programming in high schools.

The Research Institute for the Study of Language in an Urban Society (RISLUS) of the CUNY Graduate Center conducted a qualitative pilot study about LTELLs, with funding from the New York City Department of Education, Office of English Language Learners. The purpose of this study was to learn about the characteristics of LTELLs in New York City, the students' educational backgrounds, the types of services LTELLs are currently receiving, and their specific educational needs. The findings from this study provide preliminary, descriptive information about this student population that can be used to inform future programming for them.

In specific, we have identified several categories of long-term ELLs based on their educational backgrounds and school performance, which offer some answers as to why these students may take longer than average to acquire the academic English needed to succeed in school. Our findings highlight many inconsistencies in the schooling experiences of LTELLs; while some students have regularly moved back and forth between the U.S. and their family's country of origin, others have attended many different schools while in the U.S. In addition, the LTELLs interviewed have often not experienced educational continuity, moving between bilingual education and English-only programs, such as English as a second language (ESL), or into mainstream classrooms. Such inconsistencies in U.S. schooling have resulted from the students' own movements between schools or countries, and/or from incoherence in the language policies of the schools they attended.

Students who received bilingual education at any point typically attended 'weak' forms of bilingual education, such as transitional programs, which do not result in biliteracy (Baker, 2006; García, 1997). As a result, findings overwhelmingly indicate that LTELLs do not possess strong literacy skills in either English or their native language. Reading and writing in English is the greatest challenge these students face in school. In spite of this, most LTELL students feel more comfortable reading and writing in English (versus their home language). While educators interviewed typically regard the students' home language as part of the solution, many students identified it as a barrier to their English acquisition.

We found a great need at the school level to gather more accurate information about this student population, in order to provide them with appropriate programming. And, we caution against labeling ELL students “long-term” when they have been in the U.S. for six years or fewer. Most of the students in our sample have been in U.S. schools for seven years or longer; of the minority that have been in the U.S. for six years, we found almost half are currently transitioning out of ESL or bilingual programming. We therefore recommend instead that LTELLs be defined by seven years or more in U.S. schools.

The sections of this report that follow detail the study that was conducted and our findings. We analyze these findings and explore their educational implications in our discussion. And, we conclude by providing a set of recommendations to meet the needs of these students in high school along with a list of questions for future research on long-term English language learners.

Literature Review

According to Olsen and Jaramillo (1999) and Freeman and Freeman (2002), there are three main groups of English language learners (ELLs) at the secondary level:

1. Newly Arrived with Adequate Schooling
2. Newly Arrived with Limited/Interrupted Formal Schooling (also known as Students with Interrupted Formal Education or SIFE)
3. Long-term English Language Learners

The first group listed above, ‘Newly Arrived ELLs with Adequate Schooling,’ have been in the U.S. for five years or fewer and are typically literate in their home language because of the schooling they received in their country of origin. As a result, though these students receive low scores on standardized tests administered in English at the outset, they are usually able to acquire academic English and enter mainstream classrooms in a relatively short period of time (Callahan, 2006). The second group, who are termed Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) by the New York City Department of Education, are similar to the first group in that they have recently arrived in the U.S., but are distinct for their limited or non-existent literacy in their home language. As a result, the academic achievement of these students is far below grade level (Freeman & Freeman, 2002; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000).

Long-term English language learners, the third type of secondary ELLs listed above, are the focus of this study. These students are distinct from the two other groups because they are not new arrivals, but rather have been in the U.S. for six or more years (Freeman & Freeman, 2002; Freeman, Freeman & Mercuri, 2003; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). As a result, they are usually orally proficient in English and often sound like native speakers (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). In spite of their oral proficiency in English, these students are characterized by low levels of academic literacy in both English and their home language. As such, their reading and writing is usually below grade level in either language. They are characterized by poor overall academic performance and high course failure rates (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000).

While very little research has been conducted to better understand long-term English language learners, Freeman and Freeman (2002) conducted one of the only formal studies of this student population. They found that these students often received inconsistent programming, “in and out of various English as a Second Language [ESL] or bilingual programs without ever having benefited from any kind of consistent program support” (p. 5). And, they found many students

receive adequate grades from teachers simply for completing the required work; as a result, these students are characterized by a false perception of their academic achievement. A study of LTELLs in the Dallas Public Schools shows that the overall academic performance of these students does not continue to improve, and that there is a ceiling in the students' levels of academic English attainment over time (Yang, Urrabazo, & Murray, 2001).

Research indicates that literacy needs to be explicitly instructed to ELLs at the secondary level (Callahan, 2006). For example, one suggested strategy is to infuse literacy instruction across content-area subjects (Meltzer & Hamann, 2005). A study of long-term ELLs conducted by Newell and Smith (1999) employed a biliteracy approach teaching literature in the students' native languages and English, with positive results. Literacy was taught explicitly in both ESL and native language arts courses, using leveled readers and clear strategies for breaking down academic literacy into concrete pieces (e.g., by teaching students note-taking skills and plans for organizing their thoughts).

The educational programming that ELLs receive in U.S. schools from the moment they arrive to this country has a great and longstanding impact on their academic performance and skills, particularly in the area of academic literacy, and programs can either promote language shift or language maintenance over time. There is tremendous support in research for the argument that ELL students who have the opportunity to develop and maintain their native languages in school are likely to outperform their counterparts in English-only programming and experience academic success (Baker, 2006; Krashen & McField, 2005; Thomas & Collier, 1997). This is because the skills that students learn in their native language are found to transfer to English (Cummins, 2000).

In spite of these research findings, the vast majority of immigrants to the U.S. receive instruction in English only. For those who do have the benefit of receiving some bilingual education, whereby both their native language and English are used in instruction to varying degrees, most receive only 'weak' forms of bilingual education. Unlike 'strong' forms of bilingual education, such as maintenance and dual language programs which seek to develop students who are fully bilingual and biliterate (Lindholm-Leary, 2000), the goal of 'weak' forms of bilingual education is actually English acquisition (Baker, 2006). As such, these programs are found to be subtractive, where the students' native language skills are weakened over time and eventually replaced with English (Baker, 2006; García, 1997). Because U.S. schooling is characterized by an emphasis on English at the expense of native language development, the vast majority of immigrants to the U.S. will lose their native languages and shift entirely to English by the third generation (Fishman, 1991, 2001).

In their research on immigrants to the U.S., Faltis and Arias (1993, as cited in Cohen, 2007) divide immigrant students into the following categories: U.S. born–bilingually schooled, U.S. born–English-only schooled, foreign born–bilingually schooled, foreign born–limited schooling in native country, and foreign born–foreign school grade level attainment. In their discussion of U.S. born and foreign born students who have been schooled bilingually, the authors note the possibility that the students may have limited oral and/or written proficiency in their native language because they have attended transitional bilingual education programs. Similarly, students educated only in English will have limited or no native language literacy. While these proposed categories do not account for students who move cyclically to and from their country of origin, the authors do draw our attention to how educational programming can lead to limited or no native language literacy skills.

For many immigrant students, the challenge of acquiring a new language while simultaneously learning academic content is far too great, without the foundation of high levels of literacy in their native language. Literacy is a primary measure of achievement on assessments and other measures of educational performance, and is thus emerging as a major concern in the education of high school ELLs. The reality is that ELLs in secondary schools arrive with a wide range of literacy practices and skills both in English and their native language, uneven content-area backgrounds, and vastly different family and schooling experiences (Abedi, 2004; Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri 2002; Ruiz-de-Velasco, 2005). According to the 2000 Census, 52.6% of ELL students are enrolled in Pre-K to Grade 5, with the remaining 47.4% enrolled in Grades 6-12 (Capps et al., 2005). In spite of increasing numbers of secondary ELLs, older English learners have traditionally been overlooked in research, particularly in the area of literacy. For example, August and Shanahan (2006) identified 309 studies for analysis by the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth, but found that fewer than 30 of these studies focused on secondary ELLs.

The typical high school English as a second language (ESL) or bilingual program is not designed to meet the needs of ELLs with limited or no native language literacy skills, such as long-term ELLs or SIFE students (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000; Meltzer & Haman, 2005). Most high school programs were designed to meet the needs of ELLs who arrive in U.S. high schools with adequate prior schooling and native language literacy skills (Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2002; García, 1999). Because such programs assume literacy, they are typically not prepared to explicitly teach students the literacy skills necessary to navigate the secondary curriculum (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007; Callahan, 2006).

Second language acquisition research indicates that it typically takes an English language learner at least five to seven years to acquire the academic language in English needed to perform to the level of native-English speakers in classrooms where instruction is only in English (Cummins, 2000; Thomas & Collier, 1997). Yet for the students who are the focus of this study, this process takes longer than average. The purpose of this study is to gain a clearer understanding of this population in New York City schools, where such research has never been conducted, in order to learn how high schools can best meet the needs of these students.

Methodology

We conducted a descriptive qualitative study to provide preliminary information about LTELLs that can be used to guide program planning for these students at the secondary level. In specific, our research was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of Long-Term English Language Learners in New York City (e.g., country of origin, language(s) spoken at home, reading levels, test scores, classroom grades, etc.)?
2. What are the students' educational backgrounds (e.g., schools they have attended, ELL programming received, etc.)?
3. What types of services are LTELLs currently receiving in high school?
4. What are the specific educational needs of LTELL students?

Our team is comprised of five researchers: the principal investigator, a faculty consultant, and three research assistants who are doctoral students at the CUNY Graduate Center. In order to answer these research questions, we gathered data over a six month period (January-June, 2007) in three

New York City high schools. Because the literature typically defines an LTELL as a student in the U.S. for seven years or more (Freeman & Freeman, 2002; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000), while the New York City Department of Education defines LTELLs as ELLs in the U.S. for five years or more, we chose to define LTELLs in this study as ELLs in U.S. schools for six years or more.

Though all of the three schools that participated in this study serve long-term ELLs, each school is different in size, structure, and location; taken together, these schools offer a sense of the range in services and programming being provided to LTELLs in New York City. In these schools, LTELLs receive the same supports as all other ELLs, with no services specifically tailored to their needs, and are in classes with newly arrived ELLs as well. The first school is a medium-sized vocational high school located in the Bronx, where many of the 200 ELLs are long-term. Though a special program is now being started to help meet the needs of LTELLs, this program had not begun when we began our data collection. In that school, the majority of LTELLs interviewed were receiving ESL instruction.

Interestingly, the second school included in this study is a new small high school in Manhattan where all of the students are ELLs. In New York City, specialized high schools where all of the students are ELLs have a longstanding history of success in serving English learners (as in the case of International High Schools, cited in Aness, 2003; Fine, Jaffe-Walter, Pedraza, Futch, & Stoudt, 2007); however, LTELLs are typically unable to benefit from such schools because they are not new arrivals. Though this school states on paper that it admits only new arrivals, a significant number of the students are actually long-term ELLs. At this school, students receive bilingual education in a program where biliteracy development is emphasized across content-area subjects. The third site for our research is a large, traditional high school located in Queens where a very diverse population of ELLs receives bilingual education and/or ESL. In addition, native language arts courses are available in a variety of languages such as Spanish, Chinese, and Bengali.

To answer the first and second research questions above, we interviewed LTELL students in depth using semi-structured interviews; the interview protocol can be seen in Appendix A. We interviewed nine teachers and administrators who work with LTELLs to gain further information about the first and second research questions, and also to answer the third (as per the protocol in Appendix B).

For this research, the following data was collected and analyzed:

- Interviews with 29 long-term ELL students;
- Interviews with nine educators across school sites, including five administrators and four teachers; and,
- Document analysis of academic performance data (school transcripts from elementary to high school, scores on statewide and local assessments, and school records).

Interviews were the primary source of data, and quantitative school performance data served to contextualize the qualitative interview data. We analyzed the qualitative data by coding according to themes that arose repeatedly, and the findings reported below indicate the most frequent themes.

In our collection of quantitative data, we examined students' academic records. There was great variability in the data, which included transcripts, report cards, test scores, birth certificates,

home language identification surveys, and/or bilingual counseling progress reports. In order to get a better understanding of students' literacy, we focused analysis of this data on grades in English (including ESL) and language courses in the native language (e.g., literature and foreign language courses). We also focused the quantitative analysis on performance in Math. To get a picture of students' general performance in school, we looked at cumulative grade point averages. When full transcripts were not available for some students, an average of grades in English, ESL, Native/Foreign language, and Mathematics was taken. Taken together, the data collected from these schools offers a portrait of long-term ELLs and the services being provided to them in New York City high schools.

At each site, administrators identified their LTELLs; however, we found at two of the three schools that we had to turn away significant numbers of students, because they had been inaccurately selected and were not long-term ELLs (because they had been here six years or fewer). In the end, the 29 LTELLs who participated in this study are in grades 9-12, range in age from 15-19, and have been in the U.S. for 6-18 years. Matching citywide ELL demographics, the vast majority of student participants speak Spanish; most of the Spanish speakers come from the Dominican Republic, while others are from Guatemala, Mexico, Ecuador, Honduras, and Venezuela. The sample also included speakers of Twi, Chinese, and Garifuna. The table presented in Appendix C provides a description of the students who participated in this study, and offers a summary of the student characteristics. This table will be discussed throughout the report, and terms explained; the names of all participants are pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality.

Characteristics of LTELL students

Research about secondary ELLs in general, and long-term ELLs in particular, highlight large numbers of students who are in fact U.S.-born, and yet still receiving language support services. For example, one estimate is that one-third of all secondary ELLs are U.S.-born (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000) and another is that the majority are U.S.-born (approximately 70% in Dallas, according to Yang, Urrabazo, & Murray, 2001). While such research gives the false impression of educational consistency, our findings shed light on the realities behind such statistics. In fact, we find that the educational experiences of the majority of LTELLs are characterized by inconsistency and transience across countries, schools, and programs. In the case of the U.S.-born students in our sample, the majority have moved back and forth to their heritage country¹ for sustained periods of time throughout their educational careers. Frequent disruptions result in gaps and/or incoherence in schooling, which in turn negatively impact the students' linguistic and academic development, often prolonging the amount of time it takes for them to acquire sufficient academic English to enter an English-medium classroom.

From themes that arose in our interviews with teachers and students, we have pinpointed three primary groups of LTELLs. These categories consist of the following: 1) *vaién*² students, who experience back and forth movement between the U.S. and their family's country of origin, 2)

¹ In the case of transnational children born in the U.S., the phrase 'country of origin' becomes confusing, so here we use 'heritage country' to describe the country from which the family of a U.S.-born LTELL immigrated. We also refer to the 'family's country of origin' in discussions of both U.S.-born LTELLs and those born overseas.

² We credit García, Morín, and Rivera (2001) for the term *vaién*, translated as 'going and coming,' which they used to describe the unique linguistic situation of New York Puerto Ricans. We expand it here and use the term to capture the experiences of transnational students who have grown up in more than one country, moving back and forth and attending schools in their heritage country as well as schools in the U.S.

students with inconsistent U.S. schooling, and 3) transitioning students who simply require additional time to acquire another language while they are developing academic content knowledge. Inconsistent U.S. schooling pertains to students who have shifted between bilingual education and ESL programs and/or who have gone for stints without receiving any language support programming at all. The list below outlines the three major LTELL categories, with bullet points identifying subcategories.

LTELL Categories

- *Vaivén*
 - Gaps in Schooling
- Inconsistent U.S. Schooling
 - School Hoppers
 - Programming Inconsistency across Schools
 - Inconsistent School Language Policies
 - Absence of Programming
- Transitioning

As the first two categories – *vaivén* and inconsistent U.S. schooling – make up the overwhelming majority of the students in this study, it becomes apparent that LTELLs lack stability in their lives and schooling experiences, compounding the already difficult task of learning a language for academic use. Further complicating the situation, half of the students fit into more than one of the above categories. What follows is a more detailed description of each category and its sub-categories, with specific examples.

Vaivén

Twelve out of the twenty-nine students interviewed fall into the category of *vaivén*, due to their movements between the U.S. and their family's country of origin. These experiences were longer than just a vacation or summer trip, typically lasting at least one academic year and possibly extending to periods of seven or eight years, with students attending school in each country. International moves often occur repeatedly in the educational history of LTELLs, creating a cycle of need to adjust and re-adjust to a different country, language, school and family living situation.

A typical example is Luca, currently a high school junior. He was born and raised in the U.S. through first grade, he completed second and third grades in the Dominican Republic (DR), fourth and fifth grades in New York City, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades back in the DR, and from ninth grade on he has attended School 2.

It was kind of hard, it was difficult. I mean, some things are in Spanish but I mean that's what I hate about my situation, that I went to DR and forgot English. Not entirely, but most of the basic stuff. But yeah, it was difficult.
(Luca, 11th Grade LTELL, School 2, interview transcript)

In this passage, Luca reports a feeling shared by other *vaivén* students, that they have lost language, in their transnational movements.

Due to frequent back and forth experiences from a very young age, *vaivén* students often have such a complicated history that even answering straightforward questions about their lives

becomes tricky (interviewer's voice is indicated in italics):

Where were you born?

I was born in Dominican Republic.

Uh-huh.

Not really. I was born here, but I was raised in the Dominican Republic.

Okay, so you were born in New York City. And then you were raised in the DR. So when did you go to the DR?

Was actually kind of a crazy experience. I studied one year here, I went back to the DR for a year, then I came back again for one year, and I went again for eight years. I came back when I was a freshman.

(David, 12th Grade LTELL, School 3, interview transcript)

For optimal learning to take place, students need consistency, stability and a supportive environment. Language learning becomes especially difficult when it is interrupted in such extreme ways.

In most cases, students received no English instruction when attending schools in the family's country of origin, though they occasionally report taking English classes. However, English instruction elsewhere is likely to focus just on language, as opposed to academic content and explicit literacy, and is often mismatched to the level of English of students who have spent sustained periods of time in U.S. schools. One student explains the difficulties her experiences pose not only for language learning, but content as well, in her discussion of Regents exams (statewide high school exit exams):

The changes that I been going back and forth like being in DR, then coming over here, I'm getting used to class being all in English then I go back over there and it all in Spanish...

How are the Regents for you?

Here it's more difficult because the questions... it's that like since I been going back and forth and studying here and studying over there. Like the History Regents it's difficult cuz my mind with the history over there I know it more than here. And then I come here I'm studying the history but I don't get everything, you know? Like there's my head, crazy sometimes. I was telling my teacher I wish the Regents was about DR, that way I would pass it [laughs].

(Tatiana, 10th Grade LTELL, School 1, interview transcript)

In this excerpt, Tatiana explains that she knows more about the history of the Dominican Republic than that of the U.S. Her frustration is associated with differences in language, content, and especially perspective when it comes to history. This may be one explanation for the uphill challenges LTELLs face in passing the Regents exams, which are required in Math, Social Studies, Science and English in order to receive a high school diploma.

These differences across contexts, coupled with breaks in language learning, can significantly extend the time needed to become proficient in English because neither language – English nor home language – is learned consistently. This explains why *vaivé*n LTELLs often require more than the time period allotted for language acquisition by the New York City Department of Education.

Gaps in Schooling

While *vaivén* LTELLs generally complete all the grade levels sequentially, others have had significant gaps in their schooling. Such gaps in schooling typically occur as a result of a student's international movement in and out of school systems, and placement has emerged as a central issue. When arriving to a different country or when returning to the U.S., a wide range of factors such as a student's proficiency in the language of instruction and age appropriateness impact a receiving school system's decisions about placement.

Marisol's experiences between New York City and Mexico illustrate how such inconsistencies and interruptions in schooling can occur. Marisol was born in the U.S. and attended school here through fifth grade. Her start was a difficult one as she had to repeat a grade early on, because she began school in a monolingual English classroom with no language support services; though she attended one elementary school in New York, she only began receiving ESL support there in the third grade. After completing the fifth grade, she relocated to Mexico and was required to repeat the fifth grade twice due to her limited Spanish proficiency, and specifically Spanish literacy, which she did not develop at all in her elementary schooling which had been in English only. In other words, she spent a total of three years in fifth grade, due largely to language. Following her three years in Mexico, where she completed the fifth and sixth grades, she returned to New York City and, based on her age, was placed in the ninth grade. Thus, she completely missed out on seventh and eighth grade curricula, in either language. Currently Marisol is a 19 year old tenth grader at School 3. Not surprisingly, she has a low cumulative grade point average of 59.27%, and will likely be retained in grade again.

Jose Miguel, now in 10th grade at School 3, is another *vaivén* student who has had his schooling interrupted. He attended two elementary schools in the U.S., and then during his second grade year moved to Mexico, where he stayed for two years. Jose Miguel did not attend school while he was in Mexico. However, when he returned to New York City he was placed into fourth grade due to his age, in spite of the fact that he had missed most of second grade and all of third grade. Though such gaps in schooling most commonly affect *vaivén* students, this is not always the case. For example Liu, who is now a 10th Grade LTELL at School 3, arrived in the U.S. after completing third grade in China. When he arrived, he was placed into fifth grade and then skipped another grade during middle school, possibly due to his age.

Such placement practices disregard prior academic experience and create a difficult and unfair situation for students, who are unprepared for the new and cumulative content. The principal from School 1 explains the severity of this issue for LTELLs as well as others in the following passage:

You have kids who start middle school here and they'll get suspended or fail out. This happens a lot with eighth grade and the kid doesn't want summer school or a kid will fail out or get in trouble, so the kid goes home to [the Dominican Republic]. Then, after the summer or a few months, they come back and go to a placement center, and are placed in high school. I have 93 kids like that, 93 did not meet eighth grade promotional criteria that came here.

(Mr. C, principal, School 1, interview transcripts)

It is clear that missing schooling will prolong the amount of time an ELL needs in school to acquire English and the academic content needed to graduate from high school.

When students move it is often without the accompaniment of family. Instead, they spend their time living with different family members, creating another layer of complexity to an already challenging situation. Below Carola explains how her living situation changed across countries:

When I came back I was living with my godmother, then I moved, then I went to DR. When I came back I moved with my father, my real father. And then I moved with my aunt, then I moved back with my father, and again, and again, and then I moved with my aunt, and I already have a year with her.

(Carola, 11th Grade LTELL, School 2, interview transcript)

The challenges faced by *vaivén* students are manifold. Academically, linguistically, and socially they are propelled back and forth between countries, cultures, and languages. As a result, they may require extra time, support and understanding as they aim to become proficient in English while acquiring the necessary academic content to pass the many high school graduation requirements.

Inconsistent U.S. Schooling

The next category of LTELLs addresses inconsistency within schools and programs in the United States, and is striking because it impacts such a large number of students in our sample. The four sub-categories are: (a) ‘school hoppers,’ who attend multiple schools, beyond the typical three school sequence from elementary to high school; (b) students who change from bilingual to ESL programming or vice versa, when moving from one school to the next; (c) students who have received inconsistent programming within the same school, being moved from ESL to bilingual classes or vice versa each year, due to incoherent school language policies; or, (d) the temporary absence of ELL programming altogether. Twenty out of the twenty-nine LTELL students interviewed fell into this category, while three of those experienced a combination of the above sub-categories.

(a) Six students in the study reported frequent changes in schools. Shirley, a senior from School 2, attended seven schools over the span of her life. She recalls, “I move almost every year.” She went to two schools in Puerto Rico and six in the U.S. Two of the elementary schools were in the Bronx and two in were Pennsylvania, where she also experienced an interruption in ESL services. She then returned to Puerto Rico for middle school and came back to New York City to School 2, where she has remained throughout high school. While she changed schools, she also changed programs, moving from bilingual education to English-only programming to predominately Spanish classes in Puerto Rico, and finally ending up in School 2 where she initially received bilingual programming. Over time, she has transitioned into instruction entirely in English, with a Spanish literature course.

Another ‘school hopper’ is Jimmy, a U.S.-born LTELL who has never attended school in any other country. However, he attended three different elementary schools with radically different approaches toward language, until settling down to one middle and high school. He reflects on his experiences:

My teachers [at the first elementary school] were Spanish and most of the time they spoke Spanish. And they taught us how to read in Spanish. Instead of showing us how to read and write English, they taught us the alphabet in Spanish.

So it was really more...Spanish. Did you have any English in your classes?

Yeah, actually we did. Sometimes, but most of the time in Spanish.

OK, so then what happened in 3rd grade?

In 3rd grade I switched schools, and you know they just spoke English to us. But you know the teachers just taught us in English. English, English, English. And most of the kids in my class were Spanish, but the teacher only taught us in English.

(Jimmy, 9th Grade LTELL, School 2, interview transcript)

The switch from a Spanish-dominant bilingual program to a monolingual English program likely contributed to difficulties in Jimmy's transitions between schools and languages. It also likely limited his Spanish development, and made learning English and core academic content significantly more challenging.

(b) In addition to students who frequently switched schools, six LTELLs experienced inconsistent programming when making a normal transition from school to school; this created a lack of coherence in elementary, middle and high school programming. Aggie began with English-only classes in elementary school and then transitioned into bilingual programming in middle and high school. Academic literacy is a primary focus of elementary schooling, and because Aggie's primary schooling was in English only she did not have the opportunity to develop literacy skills in Spanish. She then moved into a middle school where Spanish literacy skills were expected. Such a situation does not allow for the development of a foundation in the home language, making learning content and language in the home language at the secondary level far more difficult. Although bilingual programs are more common at the elementary level, a few students at School 2 came into its bilingual program having received only ESL instruction in the past. When these students entered School 2, they experienced Spanish instruction for the first time. Not surprisingly, such mismatches in programming lengthen the time an ELL student will need language support programming.

(c) Included within the category of inconsistencies in U.S. schooling are students who have failed to receive consistent language support programming due to variances within their school's language policy. In the ideal, a school will have in place a clear and cohesive school-wide language policy that has been agreed upon by all school staff and is implemented in classrooms accordingly. So, for example, if the school offers a Chinese/English bilingual program, that the school will provide that program from year to year, and decisions about language alternation³ will be carefully planned and followed in each classroom of the school.

However, inconsistent school-based language policies are a major challenge, affecting at least six of the students in our sample, particularly in middle school. This is highlighted in the following:

So when did you have the history teacher that taught in Spanish?

That talked Spanish? When I was in sixth grade. But in seventh grade I used to have it at the first time but then they changed it to another teacher, she only speak in English.

.. And then what about math when you went to 6th grade?

Math when I went to 6th grade it was in English. It was the teacher talked in English.

Everything was in English.

English only?

Yeah. But then they change it. I don't know, they did a lot of change. They put another teacher that she talked Spanish, everything was in Spanish.

³ Language alternation refers to how much each language is used in instruction, and when.

What grade was that?

In sixth. They switched.

And what about seventh grade?

Seventh grade I had [everything] in English.

(Tatiana, 10th Grade LTELL, School 1, interview transcript)

In this excerpt, Tatiana explains how her language programming in middle school changed from year to year in a haphazard way. In history, she received bilingual instruction in sixth grade and English-only instruction in seventh grade. In math, the instruction she received in sixth grade was in English for part of the year, then bilingual for the remainder of the year, and then in seventh grade English-only again. As mentioned previously, Tatiana is also a *vaién* student, making her particularly sensitive to changes in language of instruction and extremely vulnerable to the ways such inconsistencies will impact her academic performance.

(d) Surprisingly, a total of 15 LTELLs, over half of the total sample size, had a gap in their services for a period of time while in the United States. These students had English-only programming in mainstream classrooms for a period of one to three years, without ESL or native language supports. Reasons for such gaps vary widely, ranging from students born in the U.S. who were initially not recognized as ELLs, students who leave the country/school system and then enter a new school where they lose their ELL label, a school mistakenly changes a student's ELL status only to have them return to ELL programming later, students attend a private school or a school outside of the city that does not offer ELL services, and parental choice (one student's mother initially opted out of ESL services for her). Below is an example of a newly arrived student who had to wait two years before receiving services:

Liu came to the U.S. from China without English proficiency after completing grade three. In Queens, he was placed in fifth grade at a middle school (grades five through eight) where he ended up skipping a grade, perhaps due to his age, and for the first two years did not receive any ESL services. Although he is older than his peers, being placed one grade level ahead without language support could have delayed his English development. His experience also speaks to the larger systemic issues around identification of ELLs.
(Liu, 10th Grade LTELL, School 3, interview notes)

When an ELL student does not receive appropriate services, s/he will not develop their native language or receive appropriate English language instruction. Since most mainstream teachers are unable to provide language supports for their ELLs students, students can easily fall behind. Therefore, the absence of ESL or bilingual programming, as experienced by the majority of students in this study, can severely delay language development across both languages.

In addition to experiencing inconsistencies in U.S. schooling, eight LTELLs are simultaneously classified as *vaién*. This combination creates instability across countries, schools and programs, compounding the challenges to learning. Students require time to adjust to a new land, language and approach to language and content instruction. However, when they are constantly in movement and placed (sometimes indiscriminately) into differing types of programs, acclimation and learning likely take much longer.

Transitioning

The final and smallest category of LTELLs pertains to those who simply needed additional time to develop sufficient English proficiency. Only four students in the study fell into this group and, interestingly, three of these have only been in the U.S. for six years. Francisco was one of those students. He currently has a 90% cumulative grade point average, the highest of all the students in the study, and is currently in his sixth consecutive year of school in the U.S. What sets Francisco apart from the other students in this sample is his educational background. He received very consistent primary education from his native country, the Dominican Republic. He then arrived in the U.S. for his last year of elementary school, and since then has regularly received bilingual education. He has learned to value his bilingualism, as evident in the following:

Do you feel more comfortable speaking in English or Spanish, or both equally?

I think both because if I speak in Spanish it will improve my Spanish too, and so if I do the same with English it will improve both.

(Francisco, 10th Grade LTELL, School 2, interview transcript)

As a group, transitioning students are higher performing than other students in the sample and usually newer arrivals. Research indicates it typically takes a minimum of five to seven year for an ELL to acquire academic English, and Shohamy (2001) argues it can take up to 11 years based on national research she conducted in Israel. Therefore, we recommend that the New York City Department of Education only consider an ELL long-term if they have been in U.S. schools for seven years or more.

Overall School Performance

As high school students near the end of their K-12 career, hopes and dreams of the future can be shattered by poor performance in school. The overall performance of the students in this study indicates that schools are not providing enough support to meet the academic needs of LTELLs. For the purposes of this study, we focused on performance in English (including English Language Arts and ESL), native language courses, and mathematics. We also looked at standardized test scores, particularly on Regents exams. The cumulative grade point average of all of the students is 69.2%, or a D+. Table 1 shows a breakdown of grade point average (GPA) by school.

Table 1. Average Cumulative GPA of LTELLs, by School

School	Average Cumulative GPA
School 1	66.85%
School 2	75.17%
School 3	65.72%
Average of all LTELLs	69.20%

While many of the students in this study self-report that they are doing well in school, the gauge for what “doing well” means is clearly subjective:

The only two classes that I’m failing is math and English, but other than that I think I’m really doing good.

(Jemina, 10th Grade LTELL, School 1, interview transcript).

Continued poor performance throughout their schooling may lead to lowered personal expectations for LTELLs or inaccurate perceptions of their own performance (a finding supported by Freeman & Freeman, 2002). The average GPA of students reflects the reality that students are not in fact “doing well,” and that they are performing at the C and D level. Of the 29 students in this study, six have F averages.

Standardized tests are another obstacle to LTELL school success. As stated previously, all high school students in New York are required to pass a set of five Regents exams to graduate from high school.⁴ Of the thirteen students in the sample who have taken the English Regents exam, eight have passed it. In other subjects, the majority of LTELLs have failed the Global History exam, many of them having taken it multiple times. The Math A Regents exam has also proven to be difficult for the participants; about half of those who have taken the exam passed, while the other half has failed.

Poor academic performance leads to grade retention for LTELLs, and many students in our sample have been retained in grade – some repeatedly. This, in turn, contributes to loss of confidence and motivation, as exemplified in the following quotation:

Um, I wanna tell you that I don't belong in 10th grade as you can see cause I just hit 18. I'm supposed to be in 12th and I had got left back in seventh and eighth, so like sometimes I feel embarrassed to be in a class you know that I don't supposed to be in.

(Gaby, 10th Grade LTELL, School 1, interview transcript)

As Gaby explains, failure often leads to further failure in school, as students lose confidence in their abilities. Gaby reports that her experiences as an overage LTELL cause her to shut down in the classroom, and that she does not know whom to turn to for support.

In addition to the struggles LTELLs face in the classroom, many have missed school for excessive and extended periods of time for reasons beyond their movements back and forth to their family's country of origin. Reasons such as loss of family members, personal and medical problems, not to mention the struggles urban students face, contribute to the weakening of their academic and language development.

When you came here, and also when you were in Mexico, did you ever miss school for any long periods of time, like a month or more?

Only here.

Here? When was that?

Like three years ago my grandma died, so my mom she like left for Mexico so I could stay with my cousins. But they live Jersey.

And how long was that for?

Month.

(Alina, 9th Grade LTELL, School 2, interview transcript)

⁴ To receive a diploma, students in New York must pass each of the following examinations: the English Regents Exam, one Math Regents Exam (usually students take Math A, a test of basic algebra and geometry), the Global History and Geography Regents Exam, the U.S. History and Government Regents Exam, and one Science Regents Exam.

As can be seen in this quotation, life's complexities are often intensified among transnational students.

As LTELLs underperform compared to their native English speaking peers, an understanding of the unique and myriad obstacles they face can shed light on ways that schools can adapt and modify curricula, as well as provide additional supports in order to give these students the assistance they need to succeed. It is critical to note that the average GPA at School 2 is about 10 percentage points higher than in the other schools. Because the number of students in this study is small, we cannot yet draw conclusions as to why this is the case, however it does raise questions that can and should be addressed in future studies. Consideration should be made to the school's curricular framework, student demographics, whether students were specially chosen for this study, or other factors that may serve to support students. School 2 is a small bilingual school designed specifically for Spanish-speaking ELLs whose curriculum focuses on native language literacy development alongside English literacy in all content areas. The success of high schools intended solely for ELLs, such as the International High Schools in New York City, suggests that a focused curriculum and commitment to ELLs contributes to the overall academic success of the students (Fine, Jaffe-Walter, Pedraza, Futch, & Stoudt, 2007).

Language Preferences & Proficiency of LTELL students

As described in this section, most students in our sample use both English and their native language for oral communication, while students are evenly divided between those who come from homes where only their native language is used and those from homes where both English and their native language are used. When speaking in English, LTELLs often sound like native-English speakers because of their strong oral English proficiency. In spite of this bilingual oral proficiency, however, LTELLs are characterized by limited literacy skills in both English and their native language, which affects their performance across content-area subjects. At the same time, however, students overwhelmingly prefer to read and write in English, because this is what they have predominantly been prepared to do in school.

Oral Language

The students interviewed for this study usually use both English and their native language for oral communication. A small percentage of our informants (20.7%) report that they prefer to speak English, whereas 17.2% prefer to speak in their native language. The majority of the students (62.1%), however, employ both English and their home language regularly in conversation. This often depends upon with whom they are talking:

What language do you speak with your friends?

Both. 'Cause, like, I've got black friends, and we talk English.

And then with friends who speak Spanish, you speak...

I speak Spanish with them.

(Mariluz, 9th Grade LTELL, School 1, interview transcript)

While speaking both languages can be contingent upon their conversation partner's dominant language, the term "Spanglish" came up repeatedly in interviews with students (the native language of 90% of our participants is Spanish), indicating that students often use both languages as a conversational tool. Of the 37.9% of students who expressed a specific preference for either

English or their native language, they too reported codeswitching,⁵ usually out of necessity in the classroom or at home.

As far as languages spoken at home, about half of the students in this study speak only their native language at home. The other half speaks both their native language and English. In this quotation, Alina explains how both languages are used in her home:

How much would you say, percentage-wise, you speak Spanish vs. English?

I don't know. I speak more English than Spanish.

You do?

Yeah.

Like 60%-40%?

'Cause my sister doesn't understand Spanish.

Oh... OK. And you speak Spanish or English with your mom?

Both.

And whom else do you live with?

I live with my mom, my sister, my stepdad.

And does he speak Spanish or English?

Spanish.

Only Spanish?

Yeah.

But your mom speaks both.

Yeah.

(Alina, 9th Grade LTELL, School 2, interview transcript)

Alina's family situation highlights how individual family members affect the amount of English or native language that is spoken at home. Interestingly, the students report common trends in their literacy in spite of the differences they report in their oral language practices, as detailed in the section that follows.

Literacy

In spite of differences in which languages students use at home, and their oral bilingual proficiency, literacy has emerged in this study as a major challenge for LTELLs in school. Our findings indicate that LTELL students are characterized by limited literacy skills in both English and their native language, oftentimes in spite of oral proficiency in both languages. Many educators and students cite English reading and writing as the greatest challenge that LTELLs face in school.

I think the challenge lies in the reading and writing. You'll find the students are verbal but when it comes to academic language, that's where the problem lies. If you examine the writing scores in the NYSESLAT⁶ is the most challenging part. For speaking, social speaking part is their strength so you wouldn't recognize when you see them...I think one of the things is when the kids started the program in bilingual ed and they haven't developed well either one in Spanish or English. And that's been one of the issues, they haven't

⁵ Codeswitching is defined as changing from language to language within the same utterance (Spolsky, 1998).

⁶ New York State ESL Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) is a test of English proficiency taken annually by ELLs.

developed the reading and writing in either language. You speak to them in Spanish it's the same thing, they speak well but they can't read and write. They seem to be illiterate when it comes to academic language. I think because they remain in bilingual a long time and these issues arrive when the program isn't run well.

(Ms. J, Assistant Principal, School 1, interview transcript)

As Ms. J notes, LTELLs typically have strong oral skills but struggle with their literacy, largely because the educational programs they have attended in the past, including bilingual programs, typically emphasize English acquisition rather than bilingualism and biliteracy. The challenges LTELLs face in English literacy is further supported by the students' interview data, as exemplified in the following excerpt:

For example like my test scores, you know, when I take a test, you know, it comes back it's not that good, you know, the result that I have. It's not my fault, you know, maybe I won't understand something, you know, they try to say or maybe I don't understand the big words. So that's why I don't feel that much comfortable in English, you know. Because I'm pretty bad in tests. Yeah.

(Akosua, 12th Grade LTELL, School 1, interview transcript)

As Akosua notes, her challenges with academic literacy in English reflect negatively on the test scores she receives.

Even though it is difficult for them, the students overwhelmingly prefer to read and write in English. Although city and state mandated exam scores indicate that the participants' literacy skills need further development, 23 of the 29 student participants report a preference for reading and writing in English.

I guess I've learned how to write in English and how to read in English and I only spend like a few...10 years of my life in Honduras so I didn't get to know how to write. How to write the whole system and everything in Spanish. It's easier for me in English. (Jemina, 10th Grade LTELL, School 1, interview transcript)

Jemina's preference for English was echoed by other students.

Like, when I'm reading, I like to read English better...cause I understand it better, cause since I'm used to like always talk to in English, and in school...it's better...but when I speak, I prefer to speak Spanish...Cause when I read in Spanish, I don't, I'm, I could read it but I don't understand what I'm reading...you understand?

(Karly, 12th Grade LTELL, School 1, interview transcript)

In this passage, Karly expresses a preference for reading and writing in English, even though she feels more comfortable speaking in Spanish. Although students might feel comfortable speaking in their native language, many long-term ELLs do not have well-developed native language literacy skills, as they have had more practice and exposure in American schools to English literacy.

Past and Present Educational Programming Provided to LTELLs

Overwhelmingly, the educational programming that LTELLs have received in the past has emphasized literacy development in English. Though most students in our sample participated in

bilingual education programs at some point in their education, they attended ‘weak’ forms which did not seek to promote biliteracy. In addition, most students attended English-only schooling at some point in their educational background.

This explains why LTELLs are typically orally proficient in both English and their native language, yet feel more comfortable reading and writing in English. At the same time, these students do not have strong literacy skills in either their native language or English; in fact, many students note that English literacy is their primary weakness in school. Taken together, these findings make sense for readers familiar with bilingual education theory, which argues that first language literacy skills are a key predictor of successful second language literacy acquisition (Baker, 2006; Krashen & McField, 2005; Thomas & Collier, 1997). This section describes past and present programming for LTELLs.

As can be seen in the table in Appendix C, 21 students in our sample have received a combination of ESL and/or bilingual education, 7 have received only ESL, and one student has only been educated in bilingual programs. It is poignant to note that the student who consistently received bilingual education is also the highest performing student in our sample, with a 90.79% GPA, and about to transition out of language support services. Meanwhile, the majority of LTELL students have been in bilingual and ESL programs throughout their educational careers, typically moving in and out of different programs, without systemic (K-12) consistency.

English Literacy Emphasis in Past Schooling

In our interviews, we asked students whether the schools they attended have emphasized English or native language literacy overall. Of the 25 students interviewed who answered this question, 23 indicated that their schooling has primarily emphasized English literacy. The following quotation offers an example:

In the schools you have attended, have you learned reading and writing more in English or Spanish?
English for reading and writing because it's like more easier and they teach you more in English than Spanish.
If you had to think back to your whole education, what percent of the time would you say was in Spanish?
Like 30%.
(Isabel, 9th grade LTELL, School 1, interview transcript)

Like most other long-term ELLs who participated in this study, Isabel has received a combination of bilingual and/or ESL programming. As she notes, the primary goal of instruction throughout her schools has been English acquisition. Not surprisingly, she now perceives of English literacy as ‘easier,’ because she has grown more accustomed to it. Meanwhile, she has rarely if ever been exposed in school to academic literacy in her native language.

Isabel's experiences are indicative of most students, including those who have attended bilingual education programs. In our sample, the students who enrolled in bilingual programs normally attended programs that did not seek to maintain the native language or develop student biliteracy. A theme that repeatedly arose in interviews was that within bilingual programs, teachers would use the students' native language orally, while all reading and writing occurred only in English. As one student noted:

They gave it in English but sometimes they explain it in Spanish...

So the books, what

Were in English

...So it sounds like it was what is called a transitional program, I'm going to guess...And it sounds like what you're saying it was a little more English than it was Spanish.

I think they were the same, they used the same thing...Like they gave the material in English and then they explain it in Spanish – both languages.

Okay. So when you were doing your reading and writing it was all in English?

Yeah... They all used the same method. They just explain it in Spanish and they gave the material in English. They were all the same.

(Francisco, 10th Grade LTELL, School 2, interview transcript)

As described in the preceding passage, students received written work in English, which bilingual teachers would then explain orally in Spanish to ensure student comprehension; this may be due to a shortage of materials in the native language. While this strategy is helpful, particularly for students like Francisco who arrive with strong native language literacy skills, it still provides insufficient exposure to the native language to develop biliteracy. Moreover, unlike programs where each language is seen as equal, in these cases the minority language is awarded a lesser status when compared to English. Thus students in this type of bilingual education programming had limited opportunities to develop their native language literacy skills, because reading and writing was primarily in English. Based on their reports, none of the students in our sample attended maintenance bilingual programs, such as dual language, for sustained periods.

High School Programming: The Disconnection of ESL and Foreign Language Programs to the Needs of LTELLs

At the high schools studied, LTELLs take the same classes as all other ELLs and no services are specifically targeted to their needs. As a result, LTELLs in our sample are currently enrolled in bilingual education and/or ESL programs, and most only in ESL, as well as foreign language classes taught in the student's native language. Not only do LTELLs receive no specialized services but, in fact, many of the services they do receive are mismatched to their actual language learning needs.

In specific, both the ESL and foreign language programs provided are inappropriate for LTELLs. Many LTELLs, who are orally proficient in English, maintain that ESL classes are “too easy;” this theme was very strong in our data analysis.

Which subject do you think is the least meaningful?

English.

English?

The ESL.

OK. *Why?*

Why? 'Cause mostly the things we do there, I...I already know it. I...it's like easy...

OK...*so you think ESL is...it's easy? It's too easy?*

Yeah.

(Keila, 10th Grade LTELL, School 1, interview transcript)

And do you receive ESL here?

Yeah. But I don't...to tell you the truth, I'm being real honest with you. I don't really go. It's

my last period class and I don't really go because I feel I don't need ESL. You know, and my mother believes that, so I don't really go to ESL. Like that's for people that don't know ESL, that don't know English.

And why do you think you've been having ESL?

I don't know, really. I don't know. Like to me I think that they thought that I don't know English, which I do.

(Mariluz, 9th Grade LTELL, School 1, interview transcript)

As shown in both of these quotations, the ESL classes that the students receive in high school were intended for new arrivals whose oral English proficiency skills are not as developed as those of LTELLs. Often what happens is LTELLs are placed into lower level ESL classes due to their limited literacy skills, which further compounds the situation. As a result, the classes they receive fail to engage LTELL students and serve their needs. The following quotation from an ESL teacher identifies this mismatch between the students' needs and the language proficiency expectations of the courses they receive.

What grades have LTELLs received in their classes?

It varies because like for example [Azucena] doesn't do any work, so she can do very well... The problem for them is it's easy for them to throw a decent grade without really learning that much, you know. Where the other kids have to, you know, really struggle to get a decent grade whereas they don't. And they generally don't, they generally don't push themselves to do extraordinarily well. [Azucena] can get an 80% without opening her eyes basically. And generally does.

(Mr. J, ESL Teacher, School 1, Interview Transcript)

As the teacher notes, his class is best suited for a new arrival who is at the earlier stages of learning English. Meanwhile, the LTELLs in his class are not being challenged, so they can succeed without working hard. As a result, as he notes in the case of Azucena, many students respond to low expectations by disengaging.

Similarly, when students in high school receive native language supports it is often in a foreign language class where native speakers are mixed with non-native speakers, and instruction focuses on basic grammar and vocabulary development. When students in our sample received native language arts courses, it was most often in Spanish foreign language courses in middle and high school. Because LTELLs have not received strong native language supports in their past schooling, they often find native language literacy to be a great challenge. At the same time, it is not appropriate to place them into Spanish foreign language courses either. This tension is clarified in the following quotation:

Oh my classes are in English... my Spanish class is in English. So besides that, all my classes are in English. I don't even have one class in Spanish. The only class I have in Spanish is umm... my Spanish class. And my Spanish class is in English, with people that does not speak Spanish at all.

Why are you in that class then?

I don't know. They put me in that class because when I went to the Spanish, that theirs was real people from Columbia and all of them come here. I don't know even know a word. I don't even knew what the hell they were doing. [The teacher] put me to read something and I was like, nah, what's this? And she's like, "ay," and write like a paragraph, and she's like

“you can’t be in this class, you don’t know how to write obviously.” So she put me in the other class. I got so many mistakes in Spanish that when I start reading, then after, I don’t understand what I just read. I start writing something and I’m like, I just stop like, oh, what am I gonna say? I have some mistakes in Spanish, like I eat my words, I eat the letters. I don’t write sometimes the ‘s’ the ‘l’ stuff like that. Like my Spanish teacher, she gave me uh, she told us to write a poem, and so I started writing, and she wrote like in green marker, all the mistake I had, and it was like the whole page, full of mistakes...It’s too complicated, Spanish is too complicated.

(Alicia, 11th Grade LTELL, School 3, interview transcript)

As Alicia points out in this interview, her Spanish class is primarily taught in English, with written work in Spanish focusing on grammar. There are native English speakers in her class as well, and the course curriculum was primarily intended for students learning Spanish as a foreign language. Even so, the Spanish literacy in the course is difficult for her. Like most students in our sample, Alicia has not yet mastered basic mechanics of writing in English or her native language, or generally to develop her literacy skills.

Only a few students in our sample report taking heritage language courses or Advanced Placement language courses in high school; this is a missed opportunity, as these classes could offer students the opportunity to develop their native language literacy skills, and thereby improve their English literacy as well. Only students at School 2 in our study enroll in such courses, as native language enrichment is central to their curriculum. As such, students there are exposed to Spanish literature and texts, and literacy is meant to be infused into all classes regardless of the content area. Students at Schools 1 and 3 simply receive foreign language courses which, as described above, are often not appropriate for them. Moreover, most LTELLs are receiving language support services in high schools that are mismatched to their actual language learning needs.

Inaccuracies in Data and Labeling of (LT)ELLs

We found a range of inaccuracies around the actual definition of long-term ELLs, associated with student labeling and debate around the exams which dictate a student’s ELL status. With regard to definitions, the New York City Department of Education defines LTELLs as students who have been in the U.S. for at least five years of schooling, while the literature defines LTELLs as ELLs who have been in the U.S. for seven or more years (Freeman & Freeman, 2002; Freeman, Freeman & Mercuri, 2003). Individual schools also have their own timeframes for LTELLs, while others are simply unfamiliar with this group of ELLs altogether. A precise label is vital so that instruction can be appropriately differentiated for these students.

In addition, the validity of the LTELL label was drawn into question at two of the three schools in our sample where the data the schools had about these students proved to be inaccurate. At these schools, students were identified to us as LTELLs in the U.S. for six years or more, but our interview questions revealed that some had passed the required English proficiency exam and exited from ELL services, and others had been in the U.S. for fewer than six years. In many of these cases, the data considered only their date of first entry into U.S. schooling, and overlooked time in schools outside of the U.S. (this was especially true for *vaién* students, for whom identification cannot be made based on date of first arrival, but must rather be made based on total number of years in U.S. schools).

A related statistical myth our findings dispel, as stated previously, is that of the “U.S.-born LTELL.” We found that thirteen out of the twenty-nine participants, a minority, were born in the U.S.; of those, seven were *vaién* students, meaning they had attended schools in the U.S. and their family’s country of origin. This indicates that most LTELLs were either born in another country or have spent significant periods of time attending school outside of the United States.

As mentioned, a total of fifteen students in the study have “lost” their ELL status at some point in their educational careers, and thus gone for a period of time without receiving any language support services. Taken together, these findings point to the need for more accurate data about LTELLs and better record-keeping. Moreover, such inaccuracies significantly distort the actual number of LTELLs in the New York City schools and, based on our experiences, we suspect that the actual number may be different from what schools are reporting.

Language Testing Inaccuracies

For ELLs, both the NYSESLAT and English Regents exam are important English language assessments, the former to exit out of ELL status and the latter for high school graduation. ELLs who only pass the English Regents must continue to receive ELL services if they have not yet passed the NYSESLAT, which appears to be a common scenario. Ms. J from School 1 recalls that one year she taught five ELLs who were able to pass the English Regents exam, but only one passed the NYSESLAT as well. Teachers and students often feel bewildered at the continuation of ELL services once a student has passed the English Regents exam.

I passed the English Regent. I got a good grade. I already have my Spanish Regent, which goes along with the other one, so I don’t even know why I’m doing ESL...I think I need more credits for English that’s the reason why I’m here...I think I’m passing...I think so, I don’t know.

(Alicia, 11th Grade LTELL, School 3, interview transcript)

Alicia’s confusion shows how students are not always clear on why they remain in ESL or bilingual classes. Many expressed frustration with their ELL status, especially after living in the U.S. for so many years:

I don’t know, like I always ask myself like and I talk to Ms. X, why am I in ESL if I was born in this country? I know English enough...

(Sandra, 11th LTELL, School 1, interview transcript)

Although the ELL label is perceived as one for students in the initial stages of learning English, more advanced students should understand that although their speech may be developed, they can continue to acquire academic language and literacy in ESL.

On the other hand, some LTELLs choose to fail the NYSESLAT intentionally so that they can continue to receive ESL and/or bilingual instruction:

Lots of kids fake tank the NYSESLAT on purpose. In [school name (not part of sample)], 48% said they tanked on purpose to stay in the program. One out of two said yes they failed because the teachers say *ay bendito*. They don’t want to be in a class where kids don’t speak

like me, don't want to be ostracized by their friends, they're afraid of losing the time and a half on the Regents.

(Mr. C., Principal, School 1, interview transcript)

Below a student in School 2 confirms this practice:

When I was in eighth grade you have to take a test, an English test. But I don't want to go to English school cause I'm afraid. I'm afraid like oh if I go and I do something wrong and I just, I did the test wrong cause I want to fail to be in the Spanish school.

OK, so that's the NYSESLAT? So you're basically intentionally failing it.

Mmm-hmm.

(Nadia, 9th Grade LTELL, School 2, interview transcript)

Some ELLs view bilingual and ESL programs, as well as ELL specialized schools, as safe havens, which they will lose if they test out. As outlined in this section, there exist several discrepancies in defining, labeling, and testing LTELLs that need to be addressed to best serve this student population.

Conclusion, Recommendations, and Questions for Further Research

In this descriptive study, we found that educational inconsistency is an overwhelmingly common characteristic of long-term ELLs, and that inconsistencies in school and program enrollment are likely to lengthen the amount of time it will take before an English language learner is ready to enter a mainstream classroom. The end result of years of inconsistencies in educational programming, combined with a lack of sufficient instructional time focused explicitly on native language literacy development, is that we must now address the needs of large numbers of LTELLs in high school who have limited literacy skills in either of the languages they speak. The vast majority of LTELLs in high school experience educational failure, making them a particularly high risk population for grade retention and dropout. In other words, consistency matters in order to successfully educate English language learners.

The types of inconsistencies that LTELLs experience in their schooling vary considerably. Many students are *vainén*, moving back and forth between the U.S. and their family's country of origin, often with great frequency; these students attend school both places, and some have missed years of school altogether. Others have experienced inconsistency in the educational programming provided to them in the United States, as a result of enrolling in many schools, by attending schools with inconsistent language policies, because of a lack of K-12 coherence in programming, or because they have gaps – often long – in their receipt of language support services. A number of LTELLs have had many of these experiences combined. In spite of these variations, there are commonalities in the challenges faced by long-term ELLs in high school, which appropriate programming can address.

In specific, LTELLs are characterized by low levels of academic literacy in English and their native language, and typically do not perform well in high school, regardless of the content-area subject. Even though the students are orally bilingual, and come from homes where either their native language is used in isolation or with English, the vast majority of LTELLs prefer reading and writing monolingually in English. This makes sense, given that the educational programs they have attended in the U.S., even the bilingual ones, emphasize English acquisition.

Yet high school programs are not yet set up to address the needs of LTELLs, particularly in the area of literacy learning; instead, high school programs for ELLs most often *assume* literacy but do not *teach* literacy in explicit ways. LTELLs enroll in ESL courses intended for new arrivals, and foreign language courses (in their home language) intended for native speakers of English; no educational services specifically tailored to their needs are currently being provided. This situation is compounded by the scarcity of data that schools can use to ensure they are meeting the needs of LTELLs.

Recommendations

In light of the issues presented in this report, below is a list of recommendations for educational policymakers, teachers, and school administrators to improve the education of LTELLs and thereby increase their future opportunities.

- LTELLs should be defined as ELLs who have attended school in the United States for seven years or more.
- High school programs need to teach academic literacy skills explicitly in both English and the students' native languages. Native Language Arts should be offered to LTELLs, which focus on native language literacy development. Explicit literacy instruction must also be infused into all content-area subjects, such as Math, Science, and Social Studies, in addition to ESL and heritage or native language classes. A school's approach to literacy instruction must be uniform and coordinated across all subject areas.
- All secondary teachers working with ELLs, and content-area teachers in particular, should receive professional development on how to integrate explicit literacy instruction aimed at LTELLs into their classes.
- LTELLs need to experience greater consistency in program enrollment, and movement in and out of bilingual education programs, ESL programs, and mainstream classrooms should be discouraged. When ELL students move from one school to another, they should only be placed into a school with a similar program to that in which they were previously enrolled.
- Parents and guardians of ELLs need to be informed of the deleterious effects of inconsistent programming.
- Schools must be required to adopt and adhere to clear, coherent schoolwide language policies, so they are able to provide their ELLs with consistent and constant programming.
- Developmental bilingual education programs which promote bilingualism and biliteracy should be promoted in grades K-12, particularly in middle schools, with course materials also available in students' native languages.
- Schools need more accurate data about their LTELL population so that they can do a better job both placing and serving them. To help with this, we propose the use of the intake template presented in Appendix D to aid in the identification of LTELLs.

Questions for Future Research

In addition to the preceding recommendations, the following is a list of research questions to suggest areas for possible future research:

- In what ways would high school programming focused on biliteracy development benefit LTELLs, if at all?
 - Would biliteracy development help all LTELLs, or just certain categories of LTELLs, such as *naïven* or those with a foundation in native language literacy?
- How can academic literacy be taught explicitly to secondary English language learners?
 - What are effective strategies for teaching academic literacy to LTELLs?
 - What are the effects of infusing direct literacy instruction into all content-area courses, regardless of the language of instruction?
 - Are literacy strategies effective for LTELLs also effective for SIFE students, with appropriate modifications according to levels of language and literacy skills?
- What other types of educational programming and support services would benefit LTELLs?
- What additional factors might influence an ELL becoming an LTELL?
 - Are some LTELLs actually ELLs in need of Special Education services?
 - Were some LTELLs students with interrupted formal education when they arrived to the United States? And, if so, would the identification and provision of appropriate services to SIFE students in upper elementary and middle schools reduce the numbers of LTELLs in high schools?
- How are educational programs for ELLs implemented in New York City middle schools, and to what extent are they implemented consistently?

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Appendix A: Student Interview Protocol

- 1) Where were you born?/What is your country of origin?
 - a) What language(s) do you speak at home?
 - b) Which language is used most at home – [L1] or English?
 - c) What language(s) do you speak with your friends?
- 2) When did you first come to the United States?
 - a) How long have you been in this country?
- 3) Did you attend school in your country of origin?
 - a) Did you know how to read in [L1] when you came to the U.S.?
 - b) Did you know how to write in [L1] when you came to the U.S.?
 - c) Have you ever returned to [country of origin] and attended school there? If so, when?
 - d) Did you ever miss school for a long period? If so, when? For how long?
- 4) What schools have you attended since the first time you arrived to the U.S?
 - a) What is the name of each school?
 - b) How long did you attend each school?
 - c) At those schools did you receive English as a Second Language (ESL) and/or bilingual education (were classes taught in English and [L1])?
 - d) [For each school]: At [school name], in what language(s) were your classes (Math, Science, Social Studies, etc.)? What percent of each language did your teachers use?
- 5) Do you feel more comfortable speaking in English or [home language], or both equally?
 - a) Why? Can you offer an example or tell a story to describe this?
- 6) Do you feel more comfortable reading and writing in English or [L1], or both equally?
 - a) Why? Can you offer an example or tell a story to describe this?
- 7) In the schools you have attended, have you learned reading and writing more in English or [L1]?
 - a) Have you had the opportunity to read or write in [L1] in the schools you have attended?
 - b) Do you read books in [L1]? If so, can you give examples of books you have read?
- 8) Which of your schools, programs or teachers have helped you achieve and learn the most in school?
 - a) Why? Can you offer an example or tell a story to describe this?
- 9) Which schools or programs didn't help? Why?
- 10) What do you think has stood in your way from learning English more quickly?
- 11) *[For students who have attended many schools]:* Why do you think you've attended so many schools?
- 12) What do you think are your strengths and weaknesses in school?
 - a) Can you tell a story or give an example to describe your strengths? And to describe your weaknesses?
 - b) How are you doing in school (grades, etc.)?
 - c) Do you recall ever learning about your own background (country, ethnicity, etc)? If yes, how did you feel about it?
 - d) What were the most meaningful topics you've learned about in school? Why?
 - e) What were the least meaningful topics you've learned about in school? Why?

Appendix B: Teacher/Administrator Interview Protocol

- 1) How many long-term ELLs do you serve?
- 2) What educational program(s) do they receive (e.g., bilingual education, ESL, etc.)?
 - a) How is the program structured?
 - b) Do these students receive the same services as other ELLs?
- 3) What do you see are the strengths and challenges for long-term ELL students in school?
 - a) Can you tell a story or give an example to describe this?
 - b) What do you think are the needs of long-term ELLs in school?
 - c) How are their needs the same or different from other ELL students?
- 4) What methods or teaching approaches have you tried that you think are effective with these students?
 - a) Can you tell a story or give an example to describe this?
 - b) Are there certain approaches you think don't work for these students that might work for other ELLs?
- 5) What assessment data have you collected about the long-term ELL students at this school?
 - a) What scores have they received on the English Regents? Other Regents?
 - b) What scores have they received on the NYSESLAT (New York State ESL Achievement Test)?
 - c) What grades have they received in their classes?
 - d) What do their portfolios/ classroom-based assessments/ attendance records indicate about their school performance?

Appendix C: Table of LTELL Student Participants

Name	School #	Age	Grade	Home Language(s)	Country of Birth	Total years in US	# Schools Attended	Location of Schooling	ELL Services Received			Cumulative GPA	LTELL category
									ESL	Bilingual	None		
Aggie	2	16	11	Spanish	Dominican Republic	6	5	NYC, DR	x	x	x (by choice)	76.09%	Vaivén
Akosua	1	19	12	Twi	Ghana	11	5	NYC, Ghana	x		x	68.77%	Inconsistent U.S. schooling
Alicia	3	19	11	Spanish, English	USA	13	5	NYC, Columbia	x	x	x	61.69%	Vaivén + inconsistent U.S. schooling
Alina	2	15	9	Spanish, English	Mexico	8	6	NYC	x	x	x	57.50%	Inconsistent U.S. schooling
Angela	1	17	11	Spanish, English	USA	7	3	NYC, DR	x	x		78.04%	Transitioning
Azucena	1	16	9	Spanish, English	Dominican Republic	13	4	NYC, DR	x	x	x	55.64%	Vaivén + inconsistent U.S. schooling
Carola	2	17	11	Spanish, English	USA	11	5	NYC, DR	x	x	x	84.50%	Vaivén + inconsistent U.S. schooling
David	3	18	12	Spanish, English	Dominican Republic	6	5	NYC, DR	x			71.58%	Vaivén
Edgard	2	17	11	Spanish, English	Ecuador	6	4	NYC, Ecuador	x	x		68.75%	Transitioning
Francisco	2	16	10	Spanish, English	Dominican Republic	6	4	NYC, DR		x		90.79%	Transitioning
Gaby	1	18	10	Spanish, English	USA	18	4	NYC	x	x		54.51%	Inconsistent U.S. schooling
Isabel	1	16	9	Spanish, English	USA	16	4	NYC	x	x	x	67.30%	Inconsistent U.S. schooling

Name	School #	Age	Grade	Home Language(s)	Country of Birth	Total years in US	# Schools Attended	Location of Schooling	ELL Services Received			Cumulative GPA	LTELL category
									ESL	Bilingual	None		
Jemina	1	16	10	English	Honduras	6	4	NYC, Honduras	X		x	75.83%	Inconsistent U.S. schooling
Jimmy	2	16	9	Spanish	USA	16	5	NYC	X	x	x	83.29%	Inconsistent U.S. schooling
Jose Miguel	3	16	10	Spanish, English	Mexico	11	5	NYC, VA	X	x		75.78%	Vaivén + inconsistent U.S. schooling
Karly	1	18	12	Spanish	Venezuela	10	4	NYC, DR	X	x		66.81%	Inconsistent U.S. schooling
Keila	1	16	10	Spanish, English	USA	16	3	NYC	X	x		66.81%	N/A
Liu	3	17	10	Mandarin	China	7	3	NYC, China	X		x	61.74%	Inconsistent U.S. schooling
Luca	2	17	11	English, Spanish	USA	10	5	NYC, DR	X		x	77.29%	Vaivén + inconsistent U.S. schooling
Mariluz	1	16	9	Spanish, English	Dominican Republic	7+	6	NYC, DR	X	x		52.28%	Vaivén
Marisol	3	19	10	Spanish	USA	15	3	NYC, Mexico	X		x	59.27%	Vaivén
Nadia	2	15	9	Spanish	USA	15	6	NYC, DR	X	x		75.71%	Vaivén + inconsistent U.S. schooling

Name	School #	Age	Grade	Home Language(s)	Country of Birth	Total years in US	# Schools Attended	Location of Schooling	ELL Services Received			Cumulative GPA	LTELL category
									ESL	Bilingual	None		
Norman	2	17	11	English, Garifuna, Spanish	Guatemala	7	4	Guatemala, NYC	X	x		68.80%	Inconsistent U.S. schooling
Ofelia	1	16	10	Spanish	Dominican Republic	7	4	NYC, DR	x	x	x	73.12%	Inconsistent U.S. schooling
Ramon	1	17	11	Spanish	Dominican Republic	6	4	DR, NYC	x	x		65.73%	Inconsistent U.S. schooling
Sandra	1	17	11	Spanish, English	USA	16	5	NYC	x	x		55.20%	Inconsistent U.S. schooling
Shirley	2	18	12	Spanish, English	USA	9	7	NYC, Puerto Rico	x	x	x	77.06%	Vaivén + inconsistent U.S. schooling
Tatiana	1	16	10	Spanish, English	USA	8	5	NYC, DR	x	x	x	72.58%	Vaivén + inconsistent U.S. schooling
Yi	3	17	11	Mandarin	China	6	3	NYC, China	x			64.26%	Transitioning

Appendix D: Long-Term English Language Learner Intake Template

In order to get a more complete picture of ELL students' schooling experiences, and to identify students who are LTELLs, we recommend replacing Questions 1-3 of Part 2 of the Home Language Identification Survey with the table below. We also advise schools to use this template whenever they receive a new ELL student, even if the student has a file already and has previously attended school in the United States.

Grade	Academic Year	School Name/ Number	Location (Borough/ City, State, Country)	ELL Services Received (Check as many as apply)				Language(s) of Instruction	Additional Information
				ESL	Bilingual	Transition -al	Dual Language	No ELL Services	
K									
1									
2									
3									
4									
5									
6									
7									
8									
9									
10									
11									
12									
Daycare									
Pre-K									