

Working Group on ELL Policy

For Immediate Release

March 20, 2009

Expert Group Urges Attention to English-language Learners in Stimulus Spending

A group of researchers from across the United States has released a report offering recommendations to state and school district officials on how to use the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) to improve educational outcomes for English language learners (ELLs). A rapidly growing proportion of the nation's student population, ELLs bring to school both unique learning resources and unique instructional needs. Most notably, ELLs must master a second language while learning – and being tested on – the same content required of native English speakers. National and state assessment results reveal a substantial and continuing achievement gap for ELLs compared with students learning in their first language.

The recommendations are intended to assist officials at the U.S. Department of Education, states, and districts, and are based on the Working Group's extensive knowledge and experience in the education of ELLs.

Noting that ARRA offers short-term, one time allocations, the experts recommend “uses that build infrastructure (such as improved data systems and valid assessments), accumulate instructional materials (including technology), enhance instructional capabilities of personnel to better meet ELL needs, extend learning opportunities for ELL students, and investigate key needs or barriers to improvement and then design feasible and effective ways to address them. The working group urges states and districts to select and implement those uses that support a comprehensive strategy for standards-based improvement.

The document describes how seven different parts of the stimulus act can be tapped to improve schooling for ELLs. Those parts are money for Title I (the section of the No Child Left Behind Act that authorizes funds for disadvantaged students), special education, education technology, statewide data systems, improving teacher quality, Head Start (and Early Head Start), the National Science Foundation, and the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund. Areas to which these funds can be directed include:

Instructional materials: States and districts can use ARRA Title I funds to identify, develop, and purchase instructional materials to help ELL students meet state standards and to address their language development needs. Instructional software and other interactive technologies have been shown to be especially effective for instruction to ELL students.

Learning Time: ARRA Title I allocations can extend learning time for ELLs, including extended-day or after-school programs, extended week (Saturday school), extended year (summer school and intercession), and extended school career.

Teachers: Districts and states can use ARRA funds to preserve jobs of teachers with the knowledge and skills to teach ELL students effectively. Funds can also be used to address inequities in the distribution of experienced and high-quality teachers and to improve professional development of school personnel, with a deliberate focus on instruction suitable for ELLs.

Data Collection: ARRA funds should be used to enhance data collection and reporting mechanisms for this population, ensuring that districts and states have the information they need to make necessary improvements. States could also require districts and schools to report English language proficiency results as part of Title I reporting.

Research and Development: Districts and states can use Title I funds to support their own research into how student performance on language and content tests relate to one another and how these assessments can be used at the teacher level to direct instruction.

Preschool: Districts can use ARRA funds to support staff time and expert services to align preschool curriculum and instruction with English learner needs.

Members of the Working Group on ELL Policy are among the country's most respected researchers in the field of ELL education. They bring the combined knowledge of several leading universities and educational research organizations across the United States. They include: (alphabetically)

Diane August, Center for Applied Linguistics (co-Convener)
Steve Barnett, National Institute for Early Education Research
Donna Christian, Center for Applied Linguistics
Michael Fix, Migration Policy Institute
Ellen Frede, National Institute for Early Education Research
David Francis, University of Houston
Patricia Gándara, University of California, Los Angeles
Eugene Garcia, Arizona State University
Claude Goldenberg, Stanford University
Kris Gutiérrez, University of California, Los Angeles
Kenji Hakuta, Stanford University (co-Convener)
Janette Klingner, University of Colorado
Jennifer O'Day, American Institutes for Research (co-Convener)
Charlene Rivera, George Washington University Center for Excellence and Equity in Education

Supreet Anand, a specialist in Title III and English as a second language with the Maryland State Department of Education, commenting on the report said: “This document provides the blueprint on how the ARRA funds can be directed to improve the academic performance of our growing ELL population. Every state agency should take these recommendations into consideration when planning the use of their ARRA funds.”

Pascal (“Pat”) Forgione, Superintendent of the Austin Independent School District in Texas who will be assuming a new post as Executive Director of a new Center on K-12 Assessment and Performance Management at ETS fully supported and endorsed the report. “Having led many organizations that address the instructional and assessment challenges presented by English Language Learners, these recommendations provide practical and immediately actionable steps that state and local leaders can take to leverage ARRA funds to improve their educational outcomes.”

The full Version of the report can be downloaded at: <http://www.stanford.edu/~hakuta/ARRA>

For additional information contact:

Diane August, Center for Applied Linguistics

daugust@msn.com

301-229-5077

Kenji Hakuta, Stanford University

hakuta@stanford.edu

650-862-2891

Jennifer O’Day, American Institutes for Research

joday@air.org

202-262-4987