

# The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act: Recommendations for Addressing the Needs of English Language Learners

March 20, 2009

## Overview

Funding for education in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) has two primary objectives: 1) to help stimulate national economic recovery by providing jobs and building infrastructure in the state and local educational systems, and 2) to improve educational outcomes for children, particularly those most in need. Accomplishing this second objective will also contribute to the nation's longer-term health by building the human capital necessary for continued economic growth and democratic participation. One thing is certain, however: if the new funds are used in the same old ways, this long-term objective will not be fully realized.

The purpose of this memo is to support the educational goals of the stimulus package by suggesting ways to use these funds to more effectively address the needs of a large, growing, and critically underserved population of the nation's children: English language learners. The group making these recommendations consists of researchers with extensive experience in educating ELL students and a substantial understanding of the research on effective strategies for this population.<sup>1</sup> (See Appendix A for a list of members of the ELL Working Group.) Our recommendations, directed to the U.S. Department of Education, states, districts, and advocates for English language learners, are based on our knowledge, experience, and sense of where opportunities for innovation may be found.

## Why Incorporate a Focus on ELLs?

The educational goal of the stimulus package is to improve outcomes for all of the nation's children. Within that broad goal, however, targeted attention to the growing population of English language learners is warranted and essential. We offer seven main reasons for this focus:

### 1. Rapid growth in the ELL population

"In the ten years between 1996 and 2006, the nation's K-12 ELL population rose by over 60 percent while the size of the overall student population remained essentially unchanged. As a result, the proportion of school children who are English learners has grown markedly – from 6.8 percent of the total K-12 school population in 1995-96 to 10.3 percent in 2005-2006" (Batalova, Fix & Murray, 2006). Another important trend to consider is that the fastest growth has taken place in parts of the country that have had little or no prior

experience serving ELLs in the educational system. For example, the K-12 ELL population in the new growth states of Nebraska and North Carolina rose by 301 and 372 percent respectively from 1996 to 2006 (Batalova et al, 2006).

## **2. Inadequate attention to the unique needs and resources ELL students bring to school**

For native English speakers, a foundational understanding of the English language is usually established before they enter school and then grows and deepens as they mature and are exposed to the specific language of school (academic English). In contrast, ELL students enter American schools at varying ages and without this knowledge and facility in English; they must acquire the language at the same time they are learning subject matter content. Without attention to both aspects of their learning (language and content), ELL students are unlikely to experience the success on academic standards that we want for all our children and that the stimulus package addresses in many of its programs.

At the same time, most schools fail to capitalize on the linguistic resources that ELL students *do* bring to the classroom, undermining a critical foundation for school success. A solid research base supports the use of students' home language to help them acquire the literacy skills in English that are essential for school success and workplace competitiveness (Goldenberg, 2008). In addition, bilingualism and biliteracy further enhance social, economic, and intellectual opportunities for students and are goals that many parents and educators wish to pursue. Current policy and practice do not align with what the scientific research shows about the value of the home language in promoting ELLs' school success. Nor as a nation are we taking advantage of ELLs as a source for developing the multilingual and multicultural resources of our society, which are so valuable in today's global economy.

## **3. Substantial and continuing achievement gap between ELL and non-ELL students**

Due both to the unique needs of ELL students and to our educational system's failure to adequately address these needs and capitalize on students' assets, ELLs are not succeeding in school. For example, "the results of national testing conducted in 2007 shows that nearly half (44%) of 4th grade students in the English language learner (ELL) category scored "below basic" in mathematics in 2007 – the lowest level possible. Nearly three quarters (70%) scored below basic in reading. In middle school, achievement in mathematics was lower still, with more than two-thirds (69%) of 8th grade ELL students scoring below basic. Meanwhile, the same share (70%) of 8th grade ELL students scored below basic in reading" (NCES, 2007). Another indicator of the poor educational attainment of ELL students is a large and persistent gap in school achievement between these students and non-ELL students across the nation. For example, on the National Assessment of Educational Progress in 2007 (NCES, 2007), only 7% of fourth-grade ELL students scored at or above the proficient level in reading in English compared with 36% of English speakers. Only 5% of eighth-grade ELL students scored at or above the proficient level, compared with 33% of English speakers.

#### 4. Inadequate progress in Title I

The major federal program serving ELLs, Title I, is not doing an adequate job helping these students meet challenging academic achievement standards. Twenty-four percent of the schools held accountable for AYP targets for the LEP subgroup did not make AYP for that subgroup in 2004-05; for high-poverty schools that percentage is substantially higher. Forty-nine percent of all identified schools in 2004-05 reported that they needed technical assistance on strategies for meeting the needs of their ELL students, but only half of those that needed it received satisfactory assistance to improve instruction in this area (LeFloch, Martinez, O'Day, Stecher & Taylor, 2007).<sup>2</sup> With \$13 billion of the ARRA funds being funneled through the Title I program, it is essential that this weakness in Title I services be addressed.

#### 5. Disproportionate representation in special education and a need for better tracking of progress

The disproportionate under- and over-representation of ELLs and former ELLs in special education continues to be a problem. Although Hispanic students appear to be just slightly overrepresented in the learning disability (LD) category, the national risk ratios reveal a much higher risk of LD placement in some states and among some subpopulations, such as ELLs. (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2005). In other schools and districts, ELLs are actually *underrepresented* in special education (USDOE & NICHD, 2003). Thus, the special educational needs of some ELL students are not being met while other ELLs are inappropriately classified and placed in special education services. Additionally, it can be misleading to rely exclusively on placement data to track this problem, because placement data alone provide insufficient information about opportunity to learn or educational outcomes. For example, some policies – e.g., district caps on minority placement in certain disability categories or state increases in cutoff scores used to determine over- or under-representation – may change disproportionality numbers without commensurate changes in educational programming or student opportunity or progress.

#### 6. Need for robust research to strengthen practice

In many respects, research on effective instruction for ELLs is inadequate to help educators meet the educational needs of ELLs or close the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students – both stated goals of Title 1. For example, a comprehensive review of the literature published between 1980 and 2002 (August & Shanahan, 2006) located approximately 17 experimental studies focused on developing components of literacy in ELLs; a similar panel focused on improving reading outcomes for native English speakers located approximately 450 such studies. Research is similarly sparse in many other areas of effective instruction for ELL students – e.g., in the effective use of testing accommodations (Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, 2006). Despite the overall lack of research, there are some research-based conclusions that, while lacking great precision, can provide a framework for moving toward improving educational attainment among ELLs: (1) use of the home language can help promote English language development and academic achievement, particularly in literacy, and (2) effective academic instruction in English for

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<sup>2</sup> While data for 2006-07 have not yet been released, they reveal a similar pattern.

ELLs, while similar in many ways to effective instruction for all students, also requires specific adjustments and modifications since students are simultaneously learning academic content as they learn the language in which the content is taught.

## 7. Negative consequences for failing to address these students' needs

The economies of several states with high ELL populations are teetering on the edge of bankruptcy, faring even worse than the nation as a whole. For example, California, with more than one fourth of its students classified as ELLs, has seen a precipitous decline in its tax base (Reed, 2008). The same is true for other states with large numbers of ELLs. Several recent studies have predicted a steep decline in per capita income as a direct result of failing to educate the state's youth to levels that will sustain economic growth (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2005a; 2005b; National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2005). The least educated portion of the school-age population is English language learners.

## Recommendations

Our recommendations are based on the understanding that the ARRA funds in education are one-time funds designed both to provide immediate economic stimulus and to improve the nation's long-term economic growth through the development of our major future resource – our children. In addition, we recognize that because the stimulus bill contains no funds targeted for ELL students specifically (e.g., no additional funding for Title III), attention to their needs and success must be taken up through the other program allotments. It is thus incumbent upon the U.S. Department of Education, upon governors and state education agencies (SEAs), and upon local school districts to ensure that this attention is manifested in actions that serve this large and under-served population.

Below we discuss relevant issues and recommended actions for several of the key funding streams included in the ARRA. We begin with ARRA enhancements to the two largest existing federal programs for K-12 education, Title I and IDEA, followed by smaller allocations through other existing programs. We conclude by addressing potential uses of state stabilization funds.

Two cautions are in order. First, while monies will be delivered through various funding streams, they will only be effective for improving outcomes for students to the extent that they are used **in conjunction with a coherent standards-based strategy at the state and district levels** to achieve this end. Thus, while we suggest a variety of activities for which the funds might be used, we urge districts and states to select only those uses that address identified issues in their jurisdictions and contribute to a more comprehensive strategy for improvement. Second, ARRA are **short-term, one time allocations**. We have thus encouraged uses that can 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, innovative and effective ways to address them. These are all activities that are often difficult to carry out in the context of normal budgetary constraints. They are also activities that can provide infusions of funds into the economy to pay

for additional goods and services. We anticipate that these activities would be on top of other efforts to forestall layoffs caused by the economic recession.

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## Title I Help for Disadvantaged Students

\$10 billion for grants to help disadvantaged students in nearly every school district and to help more than half of all public schools reach high academic standards. An additional \$3 billion for school improvement grants for low-performing schools.

Under NCLB, Title I has been the main source of federal funding to support ELLs in attaining high levels of achievement in core academic content areas, whereas Title III has provided limited but important funding to ensure English language development. The large infusion of ARRA funds through Title I will increase funding to schools serving ELL students, but there is very limited capacity in districts and states to use the funds effectively. Simply increasing the quantity, but not quality and types, of services will not produce the desired results for ELL children. Stimulus funds will be best invested if they are used to qualitatively improve the ways in which curriculum, instruction, assessment and accountability address the needs of ELLs.

### Issue: Attention to Language and Content Needs of ELLs

ELLs are developing both English language proficiency and academic content area knowledge and skills. These are different dimensions of student development and they have different trajectories, but they also interact. Too often, attention to language and content development is fragmented, with Title I planning, reporting, and programming focused on content areas, and Title III or other specialized programs focused on language development. For Title I services to adequately support ELL student success, districts and schools must incorporate attention to language development as well as to progress in core content in all aspects of Title I.

#### ⇒ Recommendation

Schools and districts should specifically target **both** the English language proficiency and academic content needs of ELLs (including those reclassified as fluent), within their Title I programs. Some specific state actions to ensure attention to both of these needs might include the following:

- States that choose to require new plans for LEAs to receive ARRA Title I funds should also require that these plans include clear descriptions of how the funds will specifically support language and content development for ELL students (through, for example, curriculum, professional development of site and district staff, assessment, and parental engagement).
- ARRA funds could be used to enhance data collection and reporting in order to address both English language proficiency and content knowledge for this population. Currently, language proficiency scores must be reported only at the district level and only for districts receiving Title III funds; this form of accountability thus provides little information on the progress of schools in moving their students toward English language proficiency or of students in districts not served by Title III. States could require districts

and schools to report English language proficiency results as part of Title I reporting and could disaggregate results on content tests by level of English language proficiency. These activities could be supported by ARRA funds.

- States could provide incentives to districts and schools to implement high-quality subject matter instruction and support in students' native languages.

## **Issue: Challenges of ELLs in Middle and High School**

Educational policies often assume that ELLs begin their education in the early elementary grades and that they will have learned English and been reclassified as fluent speakers by the time they enter secondary school. However, a large and growing proportion of ELLs are middle and high school students, including recent immigrants who may have substantial gaps in their formal education as well as large numbers of long-term ELLs who have not reached proficiency in academic English or coursework (Capps, Fix, Murray, Ost, Passel, & Herwanto, 2005). The needs of ELLs in secondary school are significant, and often not well addressed. The challenges identified include appropriate materials and assessments, placement in appropriate courses, and limited teacher capacity (Short and Fitzsimmons, 2007).

### **⇒ Recommendation**

Districts can use ARRA Title I allocations to identify and develop appropriate curricula and instructional methods that meet the content learning and English language development needs of ELLs, and provide focused professional development for subject area teachers to become effective in developing subject-area knowledge and academic language proficiency in their students. Professional development can also be provided to enhance teacher capacity to assess the content and language needs of ELLs.

## **Issue: Instructional Time**

ELLs are faced with learning the English language as well as academic content, both of which take time; many of these students enter school significantly behind English-speaking peers academically.

### **⇒ Recommendation**

Use ARRA Title I allocations to extend learning time for ELLs, as well as former ELLs and other language minority students who are not succeeding in school. Extended learning time might include extended-day or after-school programs, extended week (Saturday school), extended year (summer school and intercession), and extended school career. Such activities can supply much-needed jobs but can do so in a way that maintains budgetary flexibility for districts when the stimulus funds are exhausted.

## **Issue: Inadequate Instructional Materials**

Most content area materials are not suitably adapted or supported to meet the language, content, or developmental needs of ELLs. Particularly needed are materials aligned with state standards as well as with the mainstream curricula that can be used to help ELLs meet grade-level standards. Using ARRA funds to support development and purchase of instructional materials



can help meet both the short-term stimulus goals and the longer-term educational goals of the act.

⇒ **Recommendation**

States and districts can use ARRA Title I funds to identify, develop/adapt, and purchase instructional materials that will help ELL students meet challenging grade-appropriate state standards and address their language development needs. Instructional software should be among the materials considered, as well as smart boards, digital visual presenters, and other interactive technologies that have been shown to be especially effective for instruction to ELL students.

## **Issue: Too Few Classroom Adults**

Classroom teachers with large numbers of ELLs are severely limited in their ability to differentiate classroom instruction or provide additional support to respond to the varying English language and content proficiency levels of their students.

⇒ **Recommendation**

Use ARRA Title I funds to increase the number of adults providing instruction to ELL students and supports for teachers, including tutors and resource teachers. One way to do this without encroaching on future budgets is to use ARRA funds to hire new teachers who will replace those scheduled to retire in 2-3 years (when the ARRA funds disappear). These new teachers can be put into classrooms as extra adult providers and can receive valuable training while they are increasing support for ELL students.

## **Issue: Lack of Valid and Reliable Assessments for ELLs**

Valid and reliable assessment is a critical component of Title I accountability and of continuous improvement processes in schools and districts. Assessment of ELLs must address both content area knowledge and progress in learning English. However, while there is a growing *research base* on assessment of language proficiency and content area knowledge for ELLs, we lack valid *instruments* to measure ELL understanding of content or periodic progress in learning English (Rivera et al, 2006, 2008). We also lack specific knowledge about how these two types of assessment are related (i.e., how different levels of English proficiency are related to different levels of content proficiency) and how this information can be used to provide differentiated instruction for students. Finally, there is little understanding about how assessment outcomes in two languages might be combined to measure progress in both languages concurrently.

⇒ **Recommendation**

In the absence of a particular ARRA funding source for research and development, districts and states can use Title I funds to support their own research and school-level inquiry 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. In particular, states and districts should support the development of ELL-appropriate formative and summative assessments that foster accurate measurement of learning and improved instructional capacity. The U.S. Department of Education can play a key role

in encouraging and sharing innovative and promising practices in this area. ARRA incentive and innovation grants could also support this work (see below).

## **Issue: Dropouts**

The ELL population is especially vulnerable to dropping out. In 1999, among 18- to 24-year-olds not enrolled in a secondary school, 31% of language-minority students (defined as students from homes where a language other than English is spoken) had not completed high school, compared with 10% of students who spoke English at home. Moreover, language-minority students with lower levels of English proficiency were less likely to complete high school. Among language-minority students, about 51% of those who spoke English with difficulty had not completed high school, compared with about 18% of those who spoke English very well. While dropouts and transfers are key problems as well as important indicators of school success, insufficient attention is being given to dropout prevention.

### **⇒ Recommendation**

Target some portion of ARRA funds to support ELL children at risk of school failure and for dropout prevention. Funds can be used to:

- Assess practices for placing students in appropriate programs and courses and design and implement improvements – for example, ways in which high school students are placed in college-readiness courses;
- Assess instructional offerings and develop or implement a more appropriate course of study for these students;
- Monitor the progress of all ELL students, especially those at risk of school failure;
- Design and implement targeted intervention and intensive assistance where needed (for example, newcomer centers have been found to be effective for students who arrive in the upper grades with very limited English proficiency; these centers provide academic as well as social and emotional support to students); and
- Recruit and train additional counseling staff, especially those who are bilingual, to work with these students and their families.

## **Issue: Parent Engagement**

Parents of ELLs are insufficiently engaged in schools and in educational decision-making. ARRA Title I funds can be used to improve avenues for engaging parents in their children's education.

### **⇒ Recommendation**

- Funds could be used to evaluate family literacy programs and to design and implement enhancements that focus on the development of English literacy, English language, and parent-child reading activities.
- Funds could be used to prepare staff fluent in the languages spoken in the community to act as community liaisons. Their role would be to improve communication between the



school and the community, increase parental involvement, and help broker school- and family-related services for students and their families.

- Support programs that systematically train immigrant parents to advocate for their children in school, monitor homework, monitor coursework, and prepare them for high school graduation and college.

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## IDEA Special Education

\$12.2 billion for formula grants to increase the federal share of special education costs and prevent these mandatory costs from forcing states to cut other areas of education.

### Issue: Too Few Language Supports for ELLs with Disabilities

Compared to ELLs without disabilities, ELLs with disabilities are likely to receive fewer language support services and to be instructed only in English.

#### ⇒ *Recommendation*

- Districts can use ARRA IDEA funds to establish better coordination systems between special education and language support services and to support the extension of language support services to ELL students in special education programs. Districts should require that language support services not stop when special education services begin. Where possible, ELL students in special education programs should have access to support in their first language.
- Use funds to hire more psychologists to work with assessment and support of these students in their first language.

### Issue: Segregated Services

The majority of ELLs with disabilities (55%) tend to receive special education services in segregated contexts (Zehler et al., 2003). Yet federal policy stipulates that students with disabilities should receive services in the least restrictive environment. In addition, compared to their non-ELL counterparts in special education, the instructional programs for ELLs with disabilities are not “as aligned with State content/performance standards” (Zehler et al., 2003, p. viii).

#### ⇒ *Recommendation*

ARRA IDEA funds can be used to support staff or contractor time to examine placement patterns to make sure that ELLs with disabilities are no more likely than their non-ELL peers to receive special education services in segregated contexts. These funds can also be used for professional development and other interventions that will support educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment and providing access to the general education curriculum aligned with state content and performance standards.

## Issue: Inadequate Data Systems

Existing databases often do not include specific information about ELLs' language proficiency levels and disability status. Nor do they provide sufficient information about the local practices that affect ELLs' opportunities to learn or that lead to their placement in special education.

### ⇒ *Recommendation*

ARRA IDEA funds can be used to improve information infrastructures to gauge the impact of policies on ELLs with disabilities. States and districts should collect more extensive data about language proficiency and special education placement rates, and link this data with opportunity-to-learn indicators and outcome data. Funds could be used to establish more effective coordination mechanisms to bring together institutions or units that specialize in services to ELLs, students with special needs, and educational equity to develop a comprehensive system of data collection.

## Issue: Shortage of Qualified Teachers

There is a severe shortage of special education teachers who have had adequate preparation in working with English language learners and are able to provide the linguistic support they need. Even fewer special education teachers are proficient in the native languages of their students.

### ⇒ *Recommendations*

States and districts can use ARRA funds from a variety of funding streams (including IDEA and state stabilization funds) to address the shortage of special education teachers prepared to work with ELL students with disabilities. Suggestions include:

- First, protect the jobs of those who have the requisite knowledge and skills to teach ELL students with disabilities in times of fiscal retrenchment and declining enrollments.
- Establish career ladder programs and professional development opportunities for teachers who have demonstrated high levels of proficiency in Spanish and other languages commonly spoken in states and districts.
- Provide ongoing professional development for special education teachers to develop their expertise in second-language acquisition and culturally and linguistically responsive educational practices.
- Provide incentives for teacher education programs that require pre-service teachers who will be educating ELLs to develop the competencies needed to teach ELLs with disabilities. Adopt certification requirements that focus more on teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students.

## Issue: Disproportionate Representation

The disproportionate representation of ELLs in programs for students with learning disabilities continues to be a problem.

⇒ **Recommendation**

- ARRA IDEA funds can be used by states to create incentives for districts to examine their disproportionality indicators, services that ELLs receive and student outcomes so that schools can identify areas in need of improvement .
- Funds can be used to help schools and districts address the critical needs that have been identified.

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## Education Technology Grants

\$650 million for 21st century classrooms, including computer and science labs and teacher technology training.

### Issue: Digital Divide

Technology such as smart boards, digital visual presenters, and updated computers and projectors can be especially beneficial for English language learners because they provide much-needed visual support and can allow students to extend learning time outside the regular school hours. However, technology is less often found in the high-poverty schools, where most ELLs are enrolled. The resulting digital divide adds to the gap in learning opportunities for ELLs. This imbalance must be corrected by targeting funds for universal technology access to schools. This is also an opportunity for students to have access to instruction in their primary language even when the classroom teachers may not be able to provide this support.

⇒ **Recommendation**

Technology grants as part of ARRA should be directed to high-poverty schools serving this population of students. One-time expenditures for hardware such a smart boards and digital visual presenters would address both the stimulus and educational purposes of ARRA. Operating platforms and software applications relevant to ELD and content instruction are also viable investments. ARRA Title I and stabilization funds are also resources for this one-time investment in technology.

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## Statewide Data Systems

\$250 million for competitive grants to states to design and develop data systems that make longitudinal analysis of individual student data possible, providing teachers and administrators with effective tools that improve student achievement.

### Issue: Inadequate Data on ELLs

Creating and improving existing data systems that enable longitudinal tracking of student progress is important for all students, but especially for ELLs, whose designation status often varies by district and changes as they develop their English proficiency. ELLs are a diverse

group of students, who vary greatly in their length of residence in the U.S., their linguistic and geographic origins, and their history of formal education (including interrupted schooling and pre-literate backgrounds). Current state and local data systems often fail to capture critical data about ELL students and about their teachers, making the use of these data to improve instruction and student outcomes difficult. In addition, linguistic minority students continue to have unique needs even after they are formally reclassified as “fluent” or “proficient” English speakers, but state data systems often do not monitor these students after reclassification.

⇒ **Recommendation**

Apply ARRA funds to enhance data system infrastructure in ways that can support monitoring and improving outcomes for ELL students. Some specific recommendations include:

- Create a standard statewide (or national) definition of an English language learner in order to facilitate comparison of data across district contexts;
- Enable longitudinal tracking of ELL students by including a data marker for students who have been redesignated as English proficient that remains with the student throughout his or her school career. This marker will enable longitudinal evaluation of programs for ELL students and of students’ progress after redesignation.
- Data systems should include information on the instructional programs in which ELL students have participated, including both special education services and LIEP programs.
- Enable linkages between ELL students and their teachers and include teacher data relevant to ELL instruction (including special training and certifications, languages spoken, etc.).
- Other relevant background data categories that might be included are: country of origin, length of residence in U.S. and of enrollment in district schools, home language, proficiency in home language where possible, and periods of interrupted schooling.

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## Improving Teacher Quality Grants

\$300 million, including \$200 million for competitive grants to school districts and states to provide financial incentives for teachers and principals who raise student achievement and close the achievement gaps in high-need schools, and \$100 million for competitive grants to states to address teacher shortages and modernize the teaching workforce.

### Issue: Inexperienced Teachers

New teachers and teachers in the process of receiving their credential through intern or residency programs are placed disproportionately in schools and classrooms with large numbers of ELLs.

### ⇒ **Recommendation**

- Districts and states should use some of the ARRA funds to examine and rectify inequities in the distribution of experienced and high quality teachers in districts receiving these funds. Similarly, ELL student placements should be monitored to ensure that ELLs are receiving high quality instruction from skilled teachers.
- The intensity and quality of professional development and in-service programs need to be improved, and a deliberate focus on instruction suitable for ELLs is necessary. Funds should be used to help existing programs explicitly address the needs of ELLs.

## **Issue: Shortage of English-as-a-Second-Language Teachers**

Although states report that they will need at least 56,000 new ESL teachers in the next five years, few offer scholarships, tuition reimbursements, or other incentives for teachers to become specialists in the field (*Quality Counts*, 2009, p. 28).

### ⇒ **Recommendation**

ARRA funds can be used to increase the numbers of teachers with ESL expertise. Possible allocations include the following.

- Use some of these funds to design a model recruitment strategy for teachers knowledgeable about English language development and ESOL strategies.
- Use ARRA funds to provide incentives and support to train current and prospective teachers who have the potential to become highly competent ESOL teachers.

## **Issue: Shortage of Bilingual Teachers**

There is a severe shortage of bilingual teachers who are truly proficient in the native languages of the students and who have expertise in the pedagogy of bilingual instruction.

### ⇒ **Recommendation**

Use ARRA funds to support recruitment, career ladders, and professional development opportunities for teachers who have demonstrated high levels of proficiency in both English and Spanish or other languages prominent in states and districts.

## **Issue: Lack of NCLB Definition of a Highly Qualified Teacher for ELLs**

There is enormous variability in what counts as sufficient preparation to take on the challenge of teaching ELL students. In some cases a few hours on a couple weekends is sufficient to be certified. There is equal variability in the content of teacher preparation programs for teachers of ELL students. As a result, there is no agreed-upon standard for the skills that highly qualified teachers of ELLs should have. Moreover, although 33 states set teacher standards for the instruction of English-language learners, only three – Arizona, Florida, and New York – require that all prospective teachers show they are competent to teach such students (*Quality Counts*, 2009).

⇒ **Recommendation**

ARRA funds should be given to the state consortia that have been working on ELL issues to develop a set of criteria that states can agree constitute a minimum of qualifications for teachers of ELLs in different settings (e.g, mainstream, ESL, bilingual, two-way immersion programs) and/or content areas.

## **Issue: Inadequate Infrastructure in the States to Prepare Highly Qualified ELL Personnel for the Schools**

A primary reason for the uneven preparation of teachers of ELL students and for the lack of an agreed-upon definition of high-quality ELL teacher is that many institutes of higher education and school districts lack the expertise among their own faculty to prepare these teachers well. With the precipitous decline in the late 1990s in Title VII funding to support the development of faculty who would prepare teachers, there has been an eroding infrastructure in the states both to develop good pedagogical practices and to train new teachers.

⇒ **Recommendation**

Some ARRA funds should be directed to training new and existing faculty, as well as district experts, in order to build the infrastructure of qualified personnel to train new teachers of ELL students.

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## **Head Start, Early Head Start and**

## **Child Care and Development Block Grant**

Two components of ARRA address early childhood services. First, there is \$2.1 billion for Head Start and Early Head Start to provide comprehensive development services to help children succeed in school. Funds are distributed based on need. Only about half of all eligible preschoolers and less than 3 percent of eligible infants and toddlers participate in Head Start. Second, the Act allocates \$2 billion to increase the provision and quality of child care to income-eligible children of parents who are working or in school, with \$255,186,000 of this amount set aside for quality improvement (beyond the required 4 percent minimum), of which with \$93,587,000 is targeted for improving infant and toddler care. This two year funding will be available immediately, and must be used to supplement, not supplant, existing state general revenue funds.

## **Issue: Lower Enrollment in Preschool Programs**

Latinos attend preschool and early learning programs in much lower proportions than do Whites and African Americans, due to the lack of high-quality, affordable programs in Latino communities. This is exacerbated by program schedules that often do not meet the needs of working parents. Programs that are more suitable to the needs of English learners and of high quality will result in greater Latino participation.



### ⇒ **Recommendations**

Use ARRA funds to increase high-quality early childhood education opportunities for English learners through child care subsidies, Head Start and Early Head Start and to ensure that programs are full day, full year and located in the communities in which English learner children live.

## **Issue: Lack of High-Quality Preschool Programs**

English learners have language and cognitive development needs in the preschool years that can be effectively addressed through appropriate programming. (Barnett, Yarosz, Thomas, & Blanco, 2007; Gormley, 2007; Winsler, Tran, Hartman, Madigan, Manfra, & Bleiker, in press).

### ⇒ **Recommendations**

- Use ARRA funds to support staff time and expert services to align the content, including curriculum and instruction, of preschool programs with English learner needs and strengths, with particular attention to both English and primary-language oral language development as well as cognitive and social development.
- Increase the quality of appropriate services by providing training to child care, Head Start and Early Head Start teachers in second language acquisition and in strategies for working with young English learners, and by supporting the credentialing of early childhood teachers who are bilingual.
- Use funds to invest in the development of leadership skills of staff, so that there would be at least one teacher coach at each site who is a specialist in bilingual or ESL education to provide professional development to other teachers and coaches in effective services for English learners. Even a short-term use of such coaches could have long-term impact on the capacity at pre-school sites to address ELL needs.
- Use ARRA funds to incorporate family literacy programs into Head Start as feasible to reach out to language-minority parents and by involving them in their children's education from an early age.
- Provide funds for staff time and training to develop transition plans for all children that establish seamless and connected educational programming from preschool through third grade.

## **Issue: Lack of High-Quality Dual Language Preschool Programs**

Language plays a prominent role in cognitive and social development. In addition, bilingualism can be developed most effectively during these years, and children who enter kindergarten proficient in two languages have a much better trajectory (Garcia & Frede, in press). Yet dual language programming is rarely available, and opportunities for developing English are lost.

### ⇒ **Recommendations**

- Intensify the focus of the Head Start Family Literacy program on ELL parents to ensure that they understand the importance of maintaining the home language and of their involvement in their children's education from an early age.
- Provide tuition and financial support for native speakers of language-minority children's languages, including the children's parents, to earn certification and degrees in early childhood education.
- Hire bilingual, bicultural staff who can help the ELLs in each site make the transition from home to school and who can serve as liaisons with the community.

### **Issue: Disparate and Uncoordinated Systems**

Young children participate in a patchwork of care and education settings, including Early Head Start, Head Start, state- and locally funded pre-kindergarten, special education (IDEA), and private preschools and child care (both privately funded by parents and subsidized by the government or community agencies and churches). The complexity of early learning services is compounded by the fact that many children attend more than one program. Standards vary widely across programs and states. Class size, for example, can range from 15 children and two adults to over 25 children with only one adult. Teaching qualifications can be equally broad, ranging from a high school graduate with minimal training paid at minimum wage to a degreed teacher with specialization in early childhood education paid on par with a public school teacher.

### ⇒ **Recommendations**

- Use ARRA funds to include public school preschool, Head Start, Early Head Start and child care programs in all the recommendations above in the areas of: Improving Teacher Quality Grants, Statewide Data System, IDEA Special Education, and Title I Help for Disadvantaged Students.
- Collect statewide data on the characteristics of early learning programs, teachers and children to facilitate data-based decision making.

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## **National Science Foundation**

\$100 million to improve instruction in science, math, and engineering.

### **Issue: Inadequate Science Teaching**

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) science scores indicate that English language learners at all grade levels have considerably lower scores than their peers who are not ELLs – 121 scale score points compared with 153 scale score points at the fourth grade level, 107 compared with 151 at the eighth grade level, and 108 compared with 140 at the twelfth grade level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). While ELLs are doing very poorly in

science, the knowledge base for helping them succeed is also very thin. A recent comprehensive review of science teaching for ELLs (Lee, 2005) uncovered very little research on effective science instruction for ELLs.

⇒ **Recommendation**

Some of the funds allocated to the National Science Foundation could be used to review the state of knowledge regarding effective science practices with ELLs and to set an agenda for future research. In addition, a proportion of the research funds could be targeted to developing and evaluating methods for developing science knowledge in English-language learners.

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## State Fiscal Stabilization Fund

\$53.6 billion including 40.6 billion to local school districts using existing funding formulas. These funds can be used for preventing cutbacks, preventing layoffs, school modernization, or other purposes; \$5 billion to states as bonus grants for meeting key performance measures in education; and \$8 billion to states for other high-priority needs, such as public safety and other critical services that may include education. To receive these funds, states must provide assurances regarding efforts to achieve equity in teacher distribution, establishment of a longitudinal data system that includes elements in the America COMPETES Act, and enhancements in the quality of academic assessments for English language learners and students with disabilities. Additionally, ARRA authorizes the Secretary to award incentive grants in fiscal year 2010 to states that have made significant progress in these three areas. It also includes \$650 million dollars for innovation through partnerships between some combination of districts, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and SEAs.

### Issue: Teachers of ELLs are Disproportionately Out of Field

Many teachers teaching ELL are out-of-field instructors. For example, a California survey conducted in September 2008 found more than 11,000 out-of-field instructors of English-language learners, accounting for more than half of all out-of-field assignments reported during that period in the state (Education Week, p. 28). See the section on Improving Teacher Quality Grants above for additional recommendations.

⇒ **Recommendation**

States and districts with high proportions of ELLs can use these funds to provide high-quality training, mentoring, and certification for teachers working with this population of students. The training must be aligned with state and district standards, and include mentoring and support to ensure teachers are successfully applying the knowledge and skills gained in coursework before they are certified.

### Issue: Inadequate Data Systems

Assessing and improving progress of ELL students is hampered in some states by one or more of three key data limitations. First is the inability at the state level to link student-level data over

time. Data systems that include longitudinally linked data on student progress are important for all students, but especially for ELLs, whose designation status changes as they develop their English proficiency. Second, the nation as a whole – and some states in particular – lack a commonly held definition of an ELL student. Consequently, states—and districts within the same state—may use different criteria to classify students as ELLs. These inconsistencies in classification affect the validity and accuracy of and other outcome reports for the ELL subgroup (Abedi, 2004). Finally, while Title III requires its grantees to collect and report out data on levels and gains in student English language proficiency, Title I does not. Without this information, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to make district-to-district or state-to-state comparisons of annual outcomes..See the section on Statewide Data Systems above for additional recommendations.

#### ⇒ **Recommendation**

State stabilization funds can be used to:

- Develop a standard definition of longitudinal data systems.
- Support within-state and cross state activities to develop a standard definition for an English-language learner.
- Require states to track former ELLs as well as current ELLs in order to determine their progress as well as barriers to success.
- Require Title 1-funded programs to collect and report out the language proficiency data currently required under the State Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAO) provisions of Title III.

### **Issue: Inadequate Assessment**

States lack valid and reliable measures for assessing ELLs. The validity and reliability of content assessments administered in English to language-minority students may be seriously compromised when the students are not sufficiently proficient in English. Recent research on the assessment of students with limited English proficiency has demonstrated a substantial relationship between students' language proficiency and their performance on content area tests. Assessments that have more linguistically challenging content yield the largest performance gaps between English-language learners and native English speakers (Abedi, Lord, Hofstetter, & Baker, 2000). The research base on the use of accommodations with state content area standards assessments is very limited. See the section on valid and reliable assessments listed in the Title I Section above for additional recommendations.

#### ⇒ **Recommendation**

As states use ARRA funds to refine their assessment systems, they should:

- Conduct empirical research to develop and validate accommodations in state testing programs and to determine the ways in which language proficiency assessments and content area assessment can be combined to more validly assess ELL student progress.

- Encourage the development of content area assessments in students' native languages for students who have been schooled in these languages.
- Encourage the development of innovative assessment strategies that can be used for students who are learning in more than one language to encourage development in both languages, rather than in only one language or the other.

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## Conclusion

The funds available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provide an important opportunity to foment innovation and improve educational practice. Our recommendations are focused on ELLs because they represent a large proportion of students at risk of underachievement in states and districts across the country. We again emphasize that these recommendations will only be effective to the extent that they are used in conjunction with a coherent standards-based strategy at the state and district levels.

The stimulus funds are available for two years; these funds can get some of this work started but cannot solve the longer-term challenge of sustaining the reforms and innovations after ARRA monies have been exhausted. Certainly, building an infrastructure and evidence base to support improved education for ELLs is an essential first step for improving our capacity to serve this diverse group of students. But ARRA is also an opportunity to create new directions that can help set the course of the future policies, such as those that will undoubtedly be considered in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind). We hope that this document contributes to these efforts.

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