

According to the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development:

“Without a narrowing of the achievement gap between the state’s minorities and their white counterparts, demographic changes such as the slowing growth and aging of the Minnesota population will soon begin to put pressures on its abilities to meet business demands for a qualified workforce. These challenges are imminent as Minnesota’s baby boom population begins to turn 62 next year. For this reason it is imperative that the state ensure the full employability of all members of its workforce—both current and future.”

—Fennelly, K. and Huart, A., 2010, p.22



This Brief will Cover:

- I. **Background on Minnesota English Learners (EL):**
Overview of English Learner diversity, growth, and geography
- II. **Academic Disparities and English Learner Students in Minnesota:** Overview of key disparities indicators
- III. **Current National and Local Policy Frameworks:**
Updates on policies that support the equitable and adequate education of English Learners
- IV. **Key Policy Questions Including:**
 - A. How is Minnesota best identifying those students most in need of English Learner services?
 - B. Are we using the best pedagogical approach to serve English Learner students?
 - C. How are we assessing our English Learners?
 - D. Are Minnesota teachers best equipped to better serve our English Learner population?
- V. **Key Conclusions and Recommendations to address racial disparities in education of English Learners in Minnesota**

Racial Disparities in Student Academic Achievement is a Critical Challenge that Threatens Minnesota’s Social and Economic Prosperity

Attempting to address Minnesota’s racial disparities in education without understanding the variation *within cultural communities* and *across all populations* will lead to policy and pedagogical decisions that fail. Furthermore, the extent to which we accelerate the academic development of bilingual or multilingual students has a profound impact on the competitive role Minnesota plays in an increasingly global economy.

This brief provides a background on the diversity, growth, geography, and some academic achievement test results of English Learners in Minnesota and offers state policies and practices that promote the academic achievement of these students. The aim of the brief is to provide data and insights to better serve English Learners for excellent and more equitable educational outcomes.

I. BACKGROUND ON MINNESOTA ENGLISH LEARNERS

The Diversity of English Learners in Minnesota

There is a great diversity of ethnic background and languages of English Learners in Minnesota

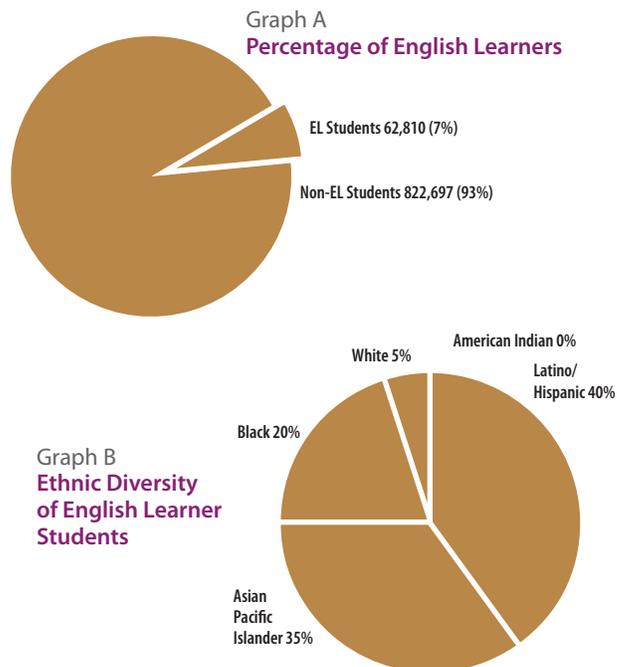
Twenty years ago, Minnesota would not have been considered a state with a significant English Learner population. In 2012, however, the story is very different. English Learners comprise approximately 7% of students in the Minnesota K-12 system (See Graph A). This includes students who are self-identified as: Latino/Hispanic (40.2%), Asian/Pacific Islander (34.4%), Black (20%), White (5.2%) and American Indian (.3%) (See Graph B).

The languages spoken at home within each of these defined racial categories vary. For instance, some students who identify as Black have English as a first language, while others speak Somali, Oromo, or other languages as their first language. The greatest heterogeneity of languages is found with the Asian/Pacific Islander category (See Graph C).

English Learners are among the fastest growing student populations

English Learners (ELs) are from those ethnic groups that are among the fastest-growing in the state of Minnesota. (State Demographer Power Point, Graph D) For example, the Latino/Hispanic population in Minnesota grew faster than any other in the state from 2000 to 2010 (See Graph D). As a result, forty percent of ELs are Latino/Hispanic, making English learning policies and practices critical to the academic achievement of this student population overall (MDE, 2010-2011).

English Learners in Minnesota 2010-2011

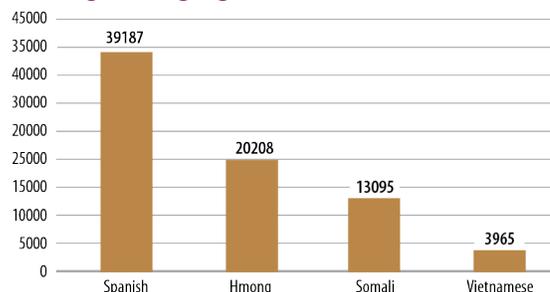


Source: Minnesota Department of Education

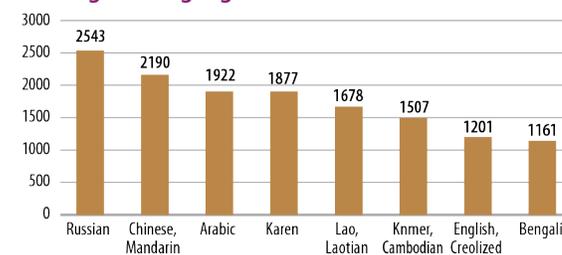
Languages Other Than English in Minnesota

Graph C

Non-English Languages—Ranked 1-4

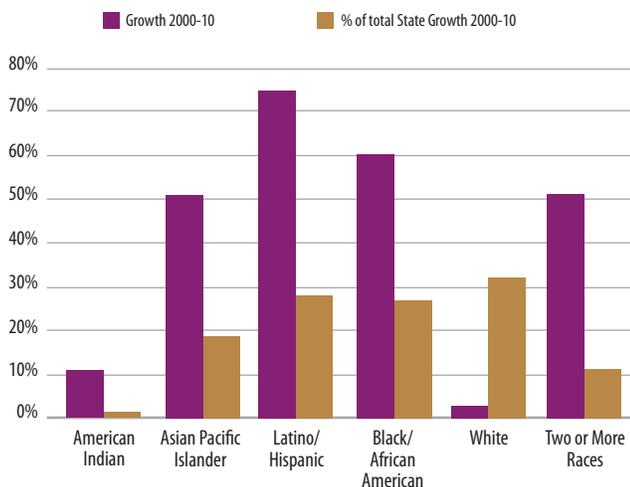


Non-English Languages—Ranked 5-12



Growth and Percent of State Growth 2000-2010

Graph D



Source: State Demographer PowerPoint, Minnesota Department of Education

The fast growth of English Learners is occurring both in the Twin Cities Metro Area and in Greater Minnesota.

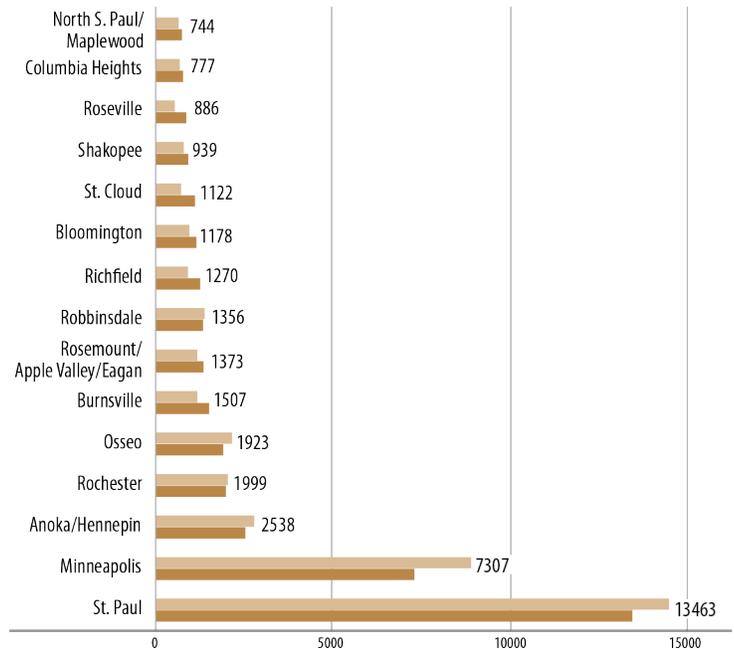
The number of English Learners (EL) increased by 7.9% from 2005-2006 to 2010-2011 according to the Minnesota Department of Education. The 7-County Metro area had the largest increase overall with charter schools in the metro area experiencing the largest gains in EL students (See Table 1.1 and Graph E). Among the fifteen Minnesota school districts outside of the seven-county Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area, thirteen of the fifteen experienced an increase in the number of English Learners in their districts over the past five years (See Graph F).

While K-12 enrollment overall decreased in the state (by -.5%), EL enrollment increased in both Metro and Non-Metro areas (See Table 1.1). Specifically, the Metro area saw the largest EL enrollment percent change of 8.4%. This table suggests that if it were not for EL enrollments, most categories would see negative enrollments.

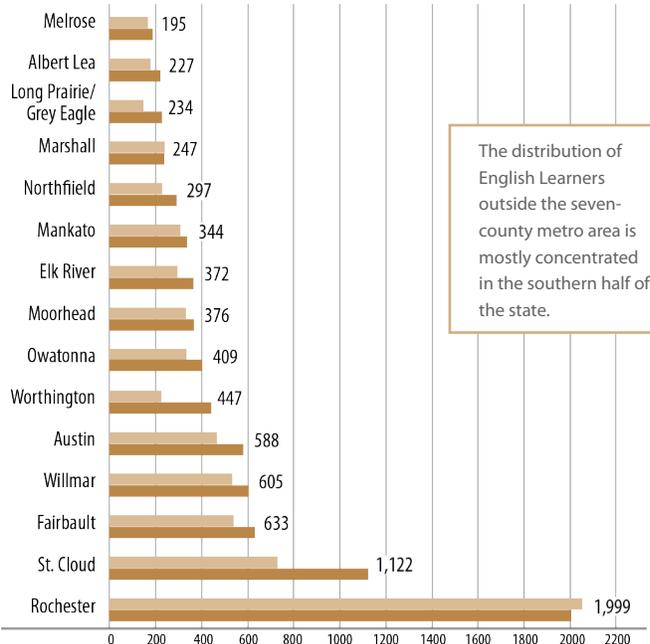
Where are English Learners in Minnesota?

■ 2005-2006 ■ 2010-2011 Number indicates 2011 level

Graph E
Largest Minnesota Public School Districts and their English Learner Enrollment



Graph F
Non-Metro Minnesota Public School Districts With the Largest English Learner Enrollment



The distribution of English Learners outside the seven-county metro area is mostly concentrated in the southern half of the state.

Source: Minnesota Department of Education 2005-2006 and 2010-2011 EL Enrollment

Table 1.1:

2005-2006 to 2010-2011 Percent Change in Minnesota K-12 Enrollment
Comparing 7-County Metro Area to Non-Metro Area

Region	Total Enrollment	
	All	EL
Metro Area	1.8%	8.4%
Non-Metro Area	-3.1%	5.9%
All	-0.5%	7.9%

Source: MDE document, "Minnesota K-12 Enrollment Comparing 7-County Metro Area and Non-Metro Area School Enrollment, December, 2012"

II. ACADEMIC DISPARITIES AND ENGLISH LEARNER STUDENTS IN MINNESOTA

Racial academic disparities between White students and students of color have been part of Minnesota education policy and practice discussions for many years (refer to other MMEP “State of Students of Color and American Indian Students 2001-2012 reports). Less discussed, but very significant, is the gap between EL and non-EL students (including student of color and White). This is evident in the academic proficiency rates of EL students compared to non-EL students in each ethnic category from the 2010 MCA Reading Test Proficiency Rates (See Graph G).

Key points from Graph G:

- There are substantial differences across ethnic groups of ELs. For example, while only 31.6% of Latino/Hispanic ELs are proficient readers, and 35.6% of Black ELs are proficient readers, 45.1% of White ELs are proficient readers.
- Most notable is the gap in reading proficiency rates between ELs and non-ELs within ethnicity groups. One of the largest gaps in reading proficiency rates is between Asian/Pacific Islander Non-EL students (82.1%) and Asian/Pacific Islander EL students (33.9%).

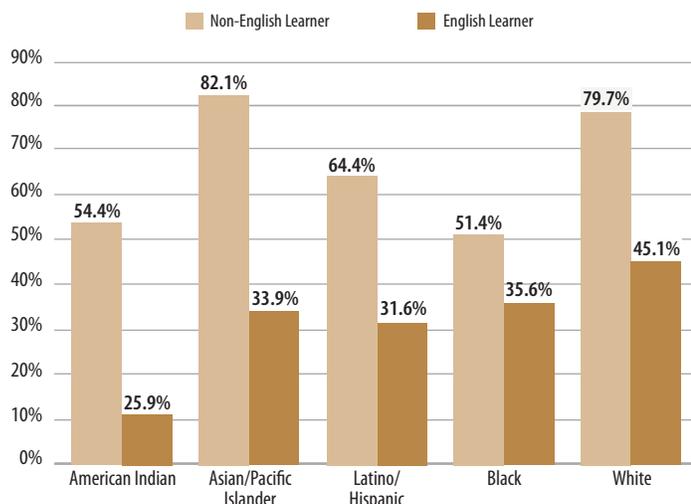
In summary, proficiency rates measured by the MCA Reading exams reveal wide disparities between English Learner students and non-English Learner students in every ethnic category group—including White students.

Dropout Rates of English Learners in Minnesota

Review of 2006-2011 dropout rate trends indicates a higher dropout rate for EL students relative to non-EL students. While English Learners have improved from 17% dropout rate in 2006 to a 10.2% dropout rate in 2011, there is still a gap of 6 percent between non-English Learners and English Learners (See Graph H).

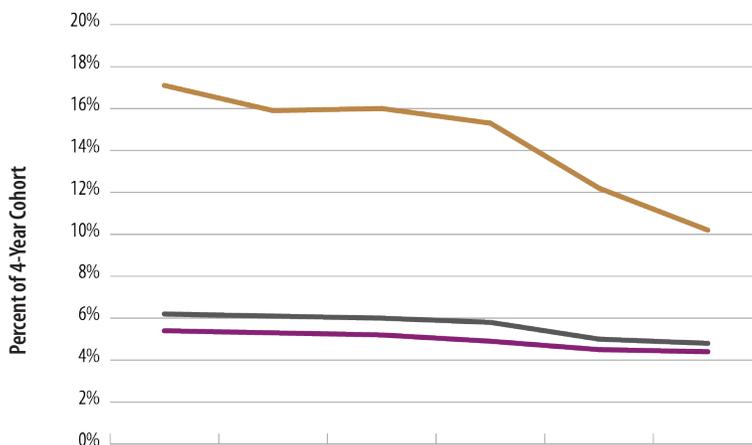
2010 Reading MCA Tests Proficiency Rates Grades 3, 8, and 10 Comparing English Learners to Non-English Learners

Graph G



Minnesota Dropout Trends for 4-Year Graduation Cohort Comparing English Learners to Non-English Learners

Graph H



	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
All	6.2%	6.1%	6.0%	5.8%	5.0%	4.8%
Non-EL	5.4%	5.3%	5.2%	4.9%	4.5%	4.4%
EL	17.1%	15.9%	16.0%	15.3%	12.2%	10.2%

Why Do These Gaps Persist?

English Learners are not inherently less intelligent than non-English Learners. Therefore, the first question often asked regarding these differences in academic achievement between EL and non-ELs is—what have been the causes of these persistent disparities?

Top researchers of achievement gap issues in the U.S. have noted the various ways the U.S. public school system and local communities—their structures, funding policies, and pedagogies have been inequitable in providing learning opportunities in substantial ways for historically marginalized groups compared to other groups. “The United States historically has had a weak commitment to the education of its English Learners. The use of non-English languages for instructional purposes in the United States has been controversial since the early 18th century, with alternating cycles of acceptance and

rejection depending on the relationship of the United States with the countries from which immigrants came and their levels of immigration.” (Gándara & Hopkins, 2010, p.22)

Since the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal act, and those legal protections of English learners that were established years before NCLB, some states have developed policies to ensure an adequate and equitable education for this student population. The next section describes the national and local policy framework for the adequate and equitable education of English Learners.

III. CURRENT POLICY FRAMEWORK

Legal Protection of English Learners and the National Policy Framework

Under the Supreme Court’s decisions in *Lau V. Nichols* (1974) and *Plyer v. Doe* (1982), respectively, school districts are required to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers and provide English learners access to the curriculum, and they may not deny an education to any child on the basis of immigration status.

Under the current Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also known as No Child Left Behind, states are required to devise English-language proficiency standards which spell out targets and benchmarks for students new to learning the English language. States must also align standardized achievement tests with those standards and assess EL students in the areas of reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Education Week, June 2010).

Recent Minnesota Education Policy and the WIDA Consortium: Greater Standards for EL Students

The Minnesota Department of Education in 2011 adopted the ‘WIDA’ (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment) standards and is now a member of the WIDA national consortium (www.wida.us). The 2012 WIDA Standards emphasize academic language development, and are closely linked to content areas (e.g. math, science, and social studies). Overall, the Consortium offers technical support as well as professional development and guidance to member states.

IV. AREAS FOR POLICY CONSIDERATION

Understanding the context of EL students in Minnesota schools and the federal and state policy priorities around these students leads us to the four focused policy questions for discussion:

- A. How is Minnesota best identifying those students most in need of English Learner services?
- B. Are we using the best pedagogical approach to serve EL students? What is being done currently for pedagogical approaches? An exploration of bilingual education as a strong approach.
- C. How are we assessing our English Learners?
- D. Are Minnesota teachers best equipped to better serve our English Learner population?

A. How is Minnesota best identifying those students most in need of English Learner services?

“Who qualifies for English Learner support?” Every state has different criteria they can use to identify English Learners. In Minnesota, the state requires that districts must formally identify English Learners for services. Minnesota Statute 124.D.59 states: “The definition of a “pupil of limited English Proficiency” is a student who fulfills these requirements:

- The pupil, as declared by a parent or guardian, first learned a language other than English, comes from a home where the language usually spoken is something other than English, or usually speaks a language other than English.
- The pupil is determined by developmentally appropriate measures, which might include observations, teacher judgment, parent recommendations, or developmentally appropriate assessment instruments. (www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes)

Additionally, “the decision to identify a student as an EL should be based on multiple measures, including an appropriate combination of teacher judgment, parental input, assessment of academic achievement and assessment of English proficiency skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing for students in grade K through 12” (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010).

Given the various ways a student can be identified, it is critical that support be provided at the local (school) level in order to ensure that skills and services are in place for these screenings to take place in a systematic, professional and timely fashion. It is also pertinent that translators be made available to communicate with parents around these issues.

B. Are we using the best pedagogical approach to serve EL students? What is being done currently for pedagogical approaches? An exploration of bilingual education as a strong approach.

It is important to note that the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has pre-selected program models to implement in order to address English Learners in local school districts. According to state law, an “Educational program for pupils of English proficiency” can either be: English as a second language program (ESL), a Bilingual Education program, or both an ESL and a Bilingual Education program (Minnesota Department of Education, 2011). According to MDE, ESL programs that can be used include: Sheltered English Instruction, Structured English Immersion (SEI), Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE), Content-Based ESL, and Pull-Out ESL (Minnesota Department of Education, 2011). The bilingual education programs described include: Dual Language, Transitional Bilingual Education, and Developmental Bilingual (Minnesota Department of Education, 2011). The strengths and weaknesses of these models are detailed in this document.

Future policy briefs and research work from MMEP will investigate the impact and academic outcomes of these various models in Minnesota.

The following section focuses on national literature that highlights the benefit of bilingual programs. While Minnesota may have a ways to go on developing the capacity to implement more of these programs (given various challenges of print materials, teacher preparation, etc..) this brief is exploring the strong evidence of the academic, cultural, and long-term impact of bilingual education for English Learner students.

Students who achieve age-appropriate language skills in more than one language have been shown to have greater cognitive flexibility, higher levels of creativity, and stronger abilities to suppress distracting information. These students also have stronger family bonds due to native language use at home, and higher levels of self-esteem and positive identity development.

1. Pedagogical Approach To Best Serve Minnesota’s English Learners: a Focus on Bilingual Education

Perhaps this is the most critical policy question in regards to improving academic achievement for more EL students in Minnesota. The *national literature* is consistent that given English Learner students highly varied educational backgrounds (i.e. experiences with formal schooling, literacy skills in native language, proficiency in the English language), there is no “one-size-fits-all” curriculum or pedagogical approach that is optimal for every English learner (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007, p.6). *However, there is broad empirical support for the benefits of developing and maintaining literacy and communication skills in the native languages of students, as well as the importance of high quality and academically oriented English as a Second Language (ESL) support.*

These are highlights of research findings on literacy and mathematics:

- Strong literacy skills in students’ native language(s) support English language and literacy development. (Thomas & Collier, 1997; August, 2002; Riches & Genesee, 2006)
- Students enrolled in bilingual programs (receiving instruction in their native language and in English) outperformed students in English-medium programs (receiving instruction only in English) on measures of academic achievement in English (Rolstad, Mahoney & Glass, 2005; Francis, Leseaux & August, 2006; Slavin & Cheung, 2005)
- Students benefit from academically oriented ESL services and support programs with rigorous curricula (Thomas & Collier, 1997; Bailey, 2006)

2. Benefits of Bilingualism

There are multiple benefits for students who participate in high quality bilingual program. Students who achieve age-appropriate language skills in more than one language have been shown to have greater cognitive flexibility, higher levels of creativity, and stronger abilities to suppress distracting information. These students also have stronger family bonds due to native language use at home, and higher levels of self-esteem and positive identity development. (Gándara and Hopkins, 2010, p.144-147) In terms of promoting long-term learning,

researchers Alejandro Portes and Ruben Rumbaut discovered that those with limited bilingualism were far more likely to leave school than those who were fluent in both languages (Nieto, 2012). In effect, these researchers conclude that affirming both language and culture, allow immigrant youth to maintain their ethnicities and have fewer school and social adjustment problems (Nieto, 2012).

Additionally, researchers note the other benefits of bilingualism. For example Craik, Bialystok and Freedman in 2010 said: “At the other end of the life cycle, neurologists have found that bilingual brains stay sharp longer than monolingual brains. Specifically, a team of Canadian researchers studied people being treated for dementia and found that those who were bilingual reported a later onset of the symptoms of dementia—about 4 years later, to be exact, than those who were monolingual.”

Given the findings that current research has provided about the individual and societal benefits of bilingualism, there is strong evidence to suggest that exploring how more districts can offer opportunities for *all students* to gain competency in more than one language would benefit students and families as well as local communities and the state of Minnesota.

C. How are we assessing our English Learners?

Minnesota currently has a system of assessments that capture proficiency levels of students in core academic subjects. In 2011, The Minnesota Department of Education has adopted the ‘WIDA’ (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment) standards and is now a member of the WIDA national consortium. The 2012 WIDA Standards emphasize academic language development, and are closely linked to content areas (e.g., math, science, social studies).

One of the benefits of WIDA is that it includes a better assessment tool for placement of EL students. Their assessment ACCESS test is intended to assess academic English language development (<http://www.wida.us/assessment/ACCESS/>). Since Spring 2012, all identified K-12 English learners take the ACCESS for ELLs™ assessment (in place of the former Test of Emerging Academic English [TEAE] and the Minnesota Student Oral Language Observation Matrix [MN SOLOM]).

The use of WIDA shows a move for Minnesota to have ELs have access to nationally developed and standardized assessment tools. These assessments are expected to better gauge academic language proficiency and development.

D. Are Minnesota teachers best equipped to better serve our English Learner population?

The success we have in developing the talents of English Learners (ELs) will depend on the skills our teacher workforce has to serve EL students. Due to the variance in languages of ELs, varying educational backgrounds in their home and/or English language, and other developmental issues, regular classroom teachers must be much more equipped to assist ELs in their classrooms.

As with content areas, all teachers will need better training, induction, and support as EL professionals in an increasingly larger EL populated schools. In 2006-2007, only 70 percent of teachers who worked in language instructional educational programs and taught the core academic subjects at the elementary level or English and math at the secondary level, and, participated in at least one hour of professional development for teaching EL students. Only 12 percent of these teachers participated in more than 24 hours of such professional development in the year (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE]). Administrators should also be trained more on the needs of ELs, their families, and how to utilize existing resources and talent pools.

As of May 2012, there were 4,137 current and expired ESL licensed teachers in Minnesota. As of October 2012, 1,367 current ESL licensed teachers were teaching in Minnesota schools (Minnesota Department of Education). Minnesota does not require all teachers to have skills that can support EL students in their classrooms. Currently, states such as Arizona, California, Florida and New York require that all teachers show competence in teaching EL Students (USDOE).

While there are many benefits to bilingual education programs, there is also wide agreement that it is essential for all teachers of English Learners are prepared to:

- Support oral language development so that students can participate in academic discussions and tasks;
- Promote academic language development;
- Value culture diversity so that school experiences reaffirm the social, cultural and historical experiences of all students.

(Samson & Collins, 2012)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Minnesota's English Language population has increased, especially beyond the Twin Cities metro area. Furthermore, racial disparities are wide within Minnesota ethnic groups between their EL populations and non-EL populations.

EL students are from those ethnic groups that are among the fastest growing in Minnesota. Overall, 40% of all English Learner students are Latino students. Reviewing reading proficiency data, it is apparent that large proficiency level gaps exist within EL student populations. Most significant, while 82.1% of non-EL Students are at proficiency level, 33.9% of Asian/Pacific Islander EL students are at proficiency levels (See Graph G).

RECOMMENDATION #1

Practitioners and policymakers must make the academic performance of English Learners from communities of color, a top priority in our discussions to close the achievement gap.

A goal of success for all students of color, without particular attention to the English Learner population and their needs, may not be reached. As districts and states set measurable race equity goals, setting a goal for English Learners (for each ethnic group) is critical to accelerating academic success for these students.

RECOMMENDATION #2

As school districts serve greater number of EL students, the Minnesota Department of Education, should play a stronger role in guiding consistent and multiple measures for identifying and screening students.

In addition, local support for screening, including translators, should be mandated to implement these key practices. Finally, to gather long-term outcomes of EL services, policymakers should capture the progress and follow and support EL students after they no longer receive such services and are "mainstreamed" into full English content instruction.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Minnesota must assess and quantify the local capacity needed to implement high quality bilingual education as the predominant pedagogical approach to meet equity and excellence outcomes for English Learners across the state.

There is broad empirical support on the benefits of developing and maintaining literacy and academically-oriented English Learner support. Research also shows that bilingualism supports family bonds and cultural connections which, in turn, may have profound effects on brain development and long-term health. Overall, national research indicates that the benefits of bilingualism are widespread.

RECOMMENDATION #4

Minnesota should produce or approve state legislation such as in Arizona, California, Florida, and New York that requires all teachers to demonstrate competence in teaching EL Students.

As of Fall 2012, all secondary teachers in training at the University of Minnesota are required to demonstrate competence in teaching academic English in content areas and are provided specialized training in doing so. A more coordinated, state-wide effort to train both new and current teachers in how to teach EL students is needed.

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