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## What Does Common Core Mean for English Language Learners?

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Across the country it is estimated that about 45% of all students in public education are Latino (National Council of La Raza, 2013). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) during the 2010-2011 academic year, 10% of students attending public schools in the United States were participating in an English Language Learners program and according to U.S. Census data, approximately 80% of all English Language Learners (ELL) are Latino (National Education Association, 2013). Moreover, research suggests that only 18.7% of ELLs perform academically succeeding above the norm and roughly 10% of ELLs in grades 7-12 are retained (National Education Association, 2013). These research findings reflect the educational outcomes of ELLs in public schools in the United States. Across the country states are beginning to implement the Common Core State Standard, a set of educational standards that provide educators a blueprint to bring *all* children attending public schools to college and career readiness. This study explores how the implementation of Common Core State Standards across the United States will impact the educational outcomes of English Language Learners.

The U.S. Department of Education defines ELLs as a national origin minority student who is limited English proficient. Furthermore, the *Lau v. Nichols* U.S. Supreme Court ruling mandates the U.S. Depart-

ment of Education to guide school districts in establishing educational programs to assist ELL students in overcoming language barriers and ensure they successfully participate in the school districts' educational programs. Nonetheless, research suggests roughly 15% of ELLs do not receive special instruction or programs designed to help them learn English and succeed in school (Hopstock & Stephenson, 2003). It is estimated that 33% of students receive some type of service intended to facilitate learning English or English as a Second Language instruction (Hopstock & Stephenson, 2003). While 10% of the students attending public schools are ELL, research findings suggest that only 18.7% of students are successfully achieving academically above the norm (National Education Association, 2013). Consequently, they are less likely to complete high school and be prepared for college and the workforce. According to the National Education Association (2013), ELL students was the fastest-growing population of public school students in the U.S. from 1990-1991 to the 2000-2001 academic school year. These findings demonstrate that ELL enrollment has increased by more than 105% in the United States, while, there was only a 12% increase of total student enrollment during the same period (NEA, 2013). NEA also found that teachers receive very little training on how to teach ELL students (2013). Of the 41% of teachers nationwide with ELLs in their classrooms, less than 15% received eight or more hours

of professional development related to ELLs in the past three years (NEA, 2013). Furthermore, less than 10% of teachers reported eight or more hours of professional development specific to ELL in seven states where more than one third of teachers were teaching ELLs (NCES, 2013). A report from the U.S. Department of Education, focused on the needs of limited English proficient students, found that only 27% of teachers of ELLs felt prepared to teach students with limited English proficiency, about 60% felt they were somewhat prepared, and 12% did not feel prepared at all (NCES, 2001). These research findings highlight that educators who are working with ELLs are not prepared to provide students with the academic support to thrive in the classroom. While the U.S. Department of Education mandates public schools to provide the services that will facilitate ELLs learning, these findings suggest that not *all* teachers working with these students are trained to assist ELL students to overcome language barriers and ensure they successfully participate in educational programs.

Public education in the United States experienced drastic changes after the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) which led to the adoption of high standards and accountability measures that required inclusion for all students with disabilities in the education system. Furthermore, this law authorized federally funded programs be administered

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by individual states. In 2001, this law was amended by Congress and reauthorized as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). It was designed to improve student achievement and change the culture of America's schools. NCLB provided 1) stronger accountability measures; 2) greater flexibility for states, school districts, and schools in the use of federal funds; 3) more choices for parents of children from disadvantaged backgrounds; 4) an emphasis on reading, especially for young children; 5) enhancement in the quality of our nation's teachers; and 6) a requirement that all children in America's school learn English (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). While these changes have been implemented via federal policy and funding has continued to be invested, students across the United States continue to perform poorly compared to students in other parts of the world, and the achievement gap between rich and poor children persists. Furthermore in 2009, the Obama administration signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act which provided \$4.35 billion dollars for the Race to the Top Fund, which sought to encourage states to adopt standards and assessments intended to prepare students for college and vocational training (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Currently, the U.S. Department of Education is allowing the educational agency of each state to request flexibility regarding specific requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of (2001 U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Once states receive a waiver they need to submit to the Department of Education a comprehensive plan designed to improve the educational outcomes of all students. According to the U.S. Department of Education, 42 states and the District of Columbia are currently approved for ESEA flexibility. Recently, a letter was sent to the U.S. Department of Education which pointed out that the flexibility that is provided to states via ESEA

flexibility has weakened accountability for student achievement (Miller et al., 2014). Congressman George Miller along with various of other Members of Congress pointed out that some of the states who received waivers did not protect students' right to an equal education, and specifically pointed out ELLs, this is critical as the ELL population is increasing yet they continue to perform poorly (2014).

While laws such as ESEA and NCLB seek to improve the educational outcomes of students and raise accountability measures, throughout the United States, educational standards of learning objectives for each grade level have historically been developed by each state, the federal government cannot dictate what the learning objectives are. Therefore, the curriculum being implemented in public schools in California, for example, is different from what is being implemented in Nevada public schools.

It is estimated that about 56% of Latino students graduate yearly, compared to 77% of their white peers (NCLR, 2013). The academic underperformance of students throughout the country is alarming for many; the low graduation rates signal challenges for our country and the future of its economy. According to the Common Core State Standards initiative, a study examined the performance of 49 countries on a series of internationally and nationally comparable tests over a 14-year period found that the U.S. overall growth in student achievement in mathematics was low compared to other countries. These results alarmed many across the country which consequently, led to the development of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative. The primary goal of CCSS is that each student who completes high school will be prepared for college or the workforce, which will consequently lead to

success in our economy. The development of the CCSS was led by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The development of CCSS was a process initiated by these organizations, in which teachers and content experts, as well as the general public, provide feedback on the CCSS development. This movement led to the establishment of CCSS which is currently being implemented in 45 states and the District of Columbia. The Common Core Standards emphasize three key points—K–12 standards in the subjects of math and English language arts shared across the states participating in CCSS; emphasis on college and career readiness specifically as students reach high school; and standards that allow instructors and their students to dive deeper in the curricula. According to NCLR, the CCSS hold promising opportunities for Latino students, but as states begin to adopt these standards, it is imperative they are implemented to facilitate Latino success in K–12 education, especially for ELLs (2013). Furthermore, many have questioned the impact Common Core will have on ELLs.

While there are many who are supportive of this initiative, there continues to be criticism over the CCSS implementation. As school districts begin to implement the Common Core standards, the National Education Association has expressed that seven of ten teachers believe that implementation of the standards is being done poorly in their schools (2013). Across the country, teachers have not been able to suggest what is needed to adequately implement the CCSS (NEA, 2014). NEA also shared that two thirds of all teachers have not been consulted on how to implement these standards in their classrooms (2014). Moreover, as the CCSS are being implemented in ELL classrooms, it is expected that the students' ability to achieve on

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CCSS based assessments will be predicted by their ability to develop the English academic language (McCormick-Lee, 2011). ELLs require appropriate instructional support. However, research has found that teachers do not feel prepared to work with ELLs in the classroom. This is problematic as experts have predicted that 25% of the U.S. public school population will be made up of ELLs by 2025 (McCormick-Lee, 2011) and research findings suggest teachers are not satisfied with the professional development opportunities provided to support ELLs in the classroom.

According to researchers William H. Schmidt and Nathan A. Burroughs, textbook publishing companies are having to rapidly develop material that reflects the CCSS and suggest that textbooks are the liaison between the CCSS and the pedagogy of teachers (2013). This is problematic for teachers who do not have the preparation and rely solely on the material that is provided via textbooks. Thus, textbooks are essential in the implementation of CCSS. An additional component of the CCSS is the adoption of new assessments that reflect the standards. Currently the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium are developing assessments that reflect the standards. In addition, the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium decided to use a computer adaptive model of testing, which is accompanied with various challenges, one being access to computers in public schools. According to NCES the ratio of students to computers in public school classrooms everyday is 5.3 to 1 (2009). Furthermore, according to the National Science Foundation, schools with high concentrations of students eligible for the Free/Reduced-Price Lunch Program or with high enrollment of minority students, tend to have less access to computers (2004).

An additional assessment that is specifically for English Language Learners and is used in some states is called, WIDA which stands for World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (2014). The purpose of WIDA is to support language development and academic achievement for students whose English is their second language via high standards, assessments, research, and professional development for educators. While this is a specific assessment that is used, it serves as an example for the assessments that will be used for the Common Core State Standards.

The development and implementation of the Common Core State Standards seeks to provide *all* students regardless of their geographic location, ethnic background, economic status, gender, and language a promise for a future where they will graduate high school prepared to contribute to the workforce, or pursue higher education. It seeks to promise economic prosperity, for those who historically have been marginalized from these opportunities. Nonetheless, as its being implemented various factors are alarming students, parents, educators, and many others across the country. While, holding all students to the highest educational standards is imperative, it is crucial that state and local educational agencies develop and implement policies that will facilitate the educational success for *all* students, especially ELLs, who are expected to be 25% of the U.S. public schools population by 2025 (McCormick-Lee, 2011). I offer the following recommendations to overcome the challenges accompanied with the implementation of the CCSS:

- State and local school districts should provide educators with professional development opportunities that will enable them to provide instructional support to ELLs.

- States and local school districts should provide educators with professional development opportunities to effectively implement the CCSS for *all* students.
- State and local school districts should provide all teachers with textbooks and supplemental educational materials that will facilitate the successful implementation of CCSS.
- The NGA Center and CCSO should collaborate with educators to assess and make recommendations if improvements are needed to enhance the Common Core and its assessments.
- State and local school districts need to assure that all schools have access to computers to effectively implement CCSS assessments.
- The NGA Center and CCSO should collaborate with teacher and education organizations to collect and share best practices and innovative models to implement the Common Core.
- The new assessments that reflect the standards, currently the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium should integrate standards and materials/lesson plans for teaching ELLs. Similar to the WIDA world class instructional design and assessment program.

States across the United States are implementing the CCSS to hold all students regardless of their background to the highest standards in English language arts and mathematics. The above recommendations seek to tackle those challenges and assure that each student is able to thrive and will graduate high school prepared for the workforce and/or higher education.

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