



Organizational Capability: English Language Learner (ELL) Student Focus

Summary Statement

JLara works in partnership with school systems and state education agencies to create and implement innovative solutions for the effective instruction of English Language Learners. Education districts and agencies across the Nation face both the excitement and the challenge of welcoming English Language Learners into their schools. There has been increased funding and attention directed at the education of these students, but understandably educators and administrators at the local level are in a “catch-up” mode as they implement new federal laws and work to serve their students well by educating all students to be competitive in today’s and tomorrow’s economy and be effective citizens.

JLara Consulting through its ELL Network team assists districts and schools with their school improvement goals focused on ELL learners. The ELL network will assess services to ELL learners at the district and school levels; conduct best practice research, work with state agencies and districts to identify and deliver technical assistance and professional development services, and encourage sustainability of best practices and innovative approaches by supporting the work of school-based learning teams. The following sections further elaborate issues presented above.

The Issue

Despite greater attention to the needs of ELLs as a result of NCLB, many schools are still unprepared to serve these students. This is particularly the case in states with substantial increases in ELL enrollments and limited history of service to this

population. For example, Arkansas, Delaware, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia, have experienced an increase of over 200% over a ten-year period (school years 1997/98 to 2007-08).¹ Districts in these states (and others) are struggling to meet the needs of a growing ELL population.

While the federal government has directed significant levels of resources to low-performing schools, it is unclear whether resources are being directed to address the needs of ELL students.² The source of the problem is not a lack of willingness to serve these students, but instead, a lack of know-how. Consequently, the benefits that can accrue from additional resources and technical assistance to schools may not be benefiting ELL students. This is especially true for those enrolled in underperforming schools, which have high enrollments of ELL students. Under the ESEA Title I school improvement provisions, and the Race to the Top (RTT) program, additional and (substantial) funding is being directed to underperforming districts and schools that have limited capacity to work with ELL students.

JLara Educational Consulting, LLC, has worked with states, districts, and schools to assist them in implementing school improvement initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for ELL learners. The following is a discussion of the overall challenge and the theory of action developed by JLara Educational Consulting.

Background: ELL Education Achievement and Attainment

Currently, there are 5.0 million ELL students attending public schools, making up 10% of the total public school enrollment.³ Ninety percent of these students are

¹ Source: United States Department of Education Biennial Report to Congress on the Implementation of Title III Formula Grant. <http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/t3sis/state/>

² Race to the Top Funds, School Improvement Funds, 13 funds.

³ Improving Outcomes for English Language Learners: Recommendations for the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. (March 26, 2010). Working Group on ELL Policy

Spanish speakers.⁴ While much has been done to expand educational opportunities for ELL students, the achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs remains significant. For example, for the 2007 school year, the percentage of ELLs scoring proficient or above on NAEP mathematics (grades 4 and 8 averaged) was 10%. By contrast, the performance of “all students” (excluding ELLs) was 34%. The percentage of ELLs who met the proficient standard for Reading in 2007 was 5.6%. By contrast, 30% of non-ELLs met the “proficient standard,” representing a 25% gap between ELLs and non-ELLs.⁵

In addition, the high school graduation rate for Latino students, who make up the largest segment of the ELL population, is 21 points lower than that of White students, and 25 points lower than Asian students.⁶ The college enrollment rate has increased for all students including Latino students. Specifically, in 1972 the Latino (Hispanic) college going rate was 45%. By 2008, the rate had increased to 64%.⁷ However, the rate of completion for Latino students at both two- and four-year colleges lags behind that of White and Asian students.⁸ Latino high school graduates who enter four-year institutions have a 41% completion rate compared with Whites (59%) and Asians (64%).⁹ Furthermore, most Latino students are more likely to attend two-year colleges where the completion rate is low. Specifically,

⁴ United States Department of Education (May, 2010). Title III Policy: State of the States ESEA Evaluation Brief: The English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act. USDE. <http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/title-iii/state-of-states.pdf>

⁵Quality Counts. 2009. Portrait of a Population: How English Language Learners are Putting Schools to the Test.

⁶ Education Week. Diplomas Count. Vol 29, No 34. June 10, 2010.

⁷ Condition of Ed 2010, Student Effort and Educational Progress, Immediate Transition to College, Tables A-20-1 and A-20-3, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010028.pdf>

⁸ Latino students (Spanish speakers) comprise 75% of the ELL population, consequently, in this section they are used as a proxy for ELL students.

⁹ The overall rate is 55%. Source: Kati Haycock. (July, 2009). Power Point Presentation to Commission of the States, Nashville, TN.

17% of all Latino students in community colleges graduate from these institutions.¹⁰

There are school and classroom-based barriers that contribute to the poor outcomes cited in the previous discussion. A recent study cited by WestEd found that, at the local level, leadership support for the education of ELL learners is mostly absent; programs at the middle school level lack coherence; students do not consistently have access to key academic subjects at grade level; and learning is guided by low expectations.¹¹

Not educating students to their fullest potential has significant consequences not only for the students themselves but for society as a whole. On the economic front, these students will comprise sizeable proportion of the future workforce whose contribution to the treasury via tax payments will help to maintain the government's commitments to its citizens particularly those receiving social security benefits. The contribution to the economy that these students can make as working adults is dependent on their level of earnings which is affected by their education and attainment of job related skills.¹² In addition, studies have shown that under-educated people are more likely to rely on government subsidies for subsistence which means a greater demand on state and local government budgets to meet the needs associated with low income populations. Finally, there is a strong relationship between low levels of education and high incidence of crime, substance abuse, low levels of civic engagement.

The factors outlined above, coupled with accountability pressures felt at all levels of the educational enterprise, has stirred many school districts to a new sense of

¹⁰ Education Trust. (January, 2011). Improving Success Access and Success: Lessons from High Performing and High Improving Colleges and Universities. www.edtrust/al.montgomery.alstateuniv.2011

¹¹ Source:

¹² National Research Council (2006). Multiple Origins, Uncertain Destinies: Hispanics and the American Future. Panel on Hispanics in the United States. M.Tienda and F.Mitchell, eds. Committee on Population, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: The national Academic Press.

urgency. They are now poised to tackle the challenges faced by educators at the school level. While the body of research on effective instructional practices for EL learners does not provide answers to all of the questions that have surfaced regarding educating ELL students, much has been learned that can now be applied to the work of the schools. As educators, we are instrumental in creating a different future for these children.

JLara Educational Consulting

JLara Educational Consulting provides educational and management consulting services to educational, nonprofit, and public sector organizations.

JLara conducts best-practice research in all areas of K–12 education, generates progress and summative reports, performs reviews of services to ELL students at the school, district and state levels, and delivers professional development services focused on instruction of ELL students. Of particular interest to JLara Consulting is to work with states and districts as they respond to the accountability requirements in Title I and Title III for school improvement and reform.

The JLara consultants are deeply knowledgeable in multiple areas of education and in project management. The consulting team brings strong pedagogical, research, and management expertise in a number of areas, perhaps the most important being the education of English Language Learners (ELLs). In this regard, the Company has reviewed school-based programs, examined early childhood services, scrutinized best-practice research, conducted analysis of programs, and prepared presentations on instructional approaches for ELL students. The focus on ELL is motivated by the commitment of JLara to help fulfill the promise of the American dream for millions of linguistic and culturally minority students whose families are contributing to the general well being of this country. Their children need to be prepared for college and work.

The ELL Network

The ELL focused work of JLara Consulting is performed through the organizational unit called the ELL Network. The ELL Network is a team of JLara consultants with expertise in strengthening teacher practice to more effectively serve ELLs, and in assessing services to ELL students. They are a team of like-minded and informed experts/practitioners who have worked in leadership capacities (policy, management, instruction, and professional development) to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for ELLs.

The Network is guided by the belief that educational outcomes for ELLs will only improve when a broader school reform strategy is coupled with specific attention to ELL student's learners and their families. Therefore, the group is committed to advancing the success of all students in the public and charter school systems. Interventions should build on the ELLs linguistic and cultural repertoire and focus on classroom instruction, school leadership, family and community linkages, school climate, and other elements of the school organization that bear on the education of these students.

Much has been learned in recent years about practices that lead to the educational success of EL learners. JLara technical assistance translates this research into "lessons learned" schools can apply themselves to the benefit of ELLs and other students.

ELL Network Approach

The ELL Network approach is a participatory school improvement process designed to bring best-practice research to the work of district and school-level educators focused on ELL learners. The network will help to create and sustain a school-based "learning team" whose primary task is to work on increasing the capacity of schools to work effectively with ELL learners during a 1-3 year period of engagement. Research has shown that ongoing support provided by peers in learning teams can result in more successful implementation of best practices at

the classroom level. It is through the learning, conversations, and application of novel ideas that school communities will address critical challenges facing educators at the school level.

The school improvement process will be comprised of three component parts: 1) Goal Setting, 2) Needs Analysis, and 3) Technical Assistance.

Goal Setting

Initial conversation with leadership. In order for these teams to be successful, certain conditions need to be present at the district and state levels. There is an ample body of research that points to failures of school improvement efforts when the conditions for success do not exist. These conditions include factors such as appropriate levels of financial support, human resources, instructional, and curricular supports. Thus, the ELL network will engage in conversations and planning with district and state officials (as necessary) to obtain a *deeper understanding of leadership challenges, aspirations, accomplishments, constraints, and possibilities, and to ensure buy-in* for smooth implementation of plans devised by the school-based leadership team.

Background research. Once readiness is established, JLara Consulting will review school/district-based information available through the public domain. Data elements will include student performance, funding sources at school or district level, use of human capital and fiscal resources, teacher quality, and organizational roles and responsibilities.

Best-practice research. The purpose of this research is to identify and translate research findings into specific actions; literature is abundant but it needs to be presented in a way that supports plans of actions to schools and districts.

Needs Analysis

The focus of the district- and school-based needs assessment is to identify areas of strength and weakness and develop an inventory of classroom practices aimed at

meeting the instructional needs of ELL students. The ELL Network team will develop a series of questions designed to elicit information regarding the instructional delivery system. In addition the team will observe a selected number of classrooms to better understand the teacher practice and instructional challenges and opportunities. The goal is to conduct an assessment of current supports/practices at the school and district levels, identify gaps, and develop a plan to address these gaps in services.

Tools. The data-gathering approach and specific tools will vary depending on the unit of analysis. Nonetheless, at the levels identified below, the following data approaches will be used:

- District Level: Interviews, surveys, focus groups
Outcome: Reports and recommendation
- School Level: Interviews (principal, teachers, parents); surveys
Outcome: School analysis report and recommendations
- Classroom Level: Observations
Outcome: Report and recommendation

Based on the learning from the needs assessment processes outlined above, the team will engage a cross section of the school community with the intent of creating a cross-functional team that will work with the external technical assistance team to engage in a school renewal process. Areas of inquiry to be explored:

- Leadership: How does the school/district show that it is committed to ELL achievement?
- Professional Development: Is the staff trained in SIOP, GLAD, or other appropriate instructional methods?
- Parent Involvement: Are there regular meetings and parent events? Is the school connected to existing resources (e.g., Family Literacy (KY), Parents as Partners, Ready at Five, NCLR programs)?

- **Accountability:** How does the school hold all teachers accountable for ELL performance? Are there multiple measurement tools in place?
- **Individual Supports:** What resources are available to students and teachers?
- **Resources and Materials:** Are the instructional materials being used appropriate for ELLs? Do the materials meet the needs of long-term ELLs and those with interrupted education?
- **Program Flexibility:** How does the school recognize and address the needs of adolescent ELLs? Are there alternative learning programs in place?

Conversations with various sectors of the school/district community will uncover what works well and the areas of need.

Technical Assistance

JLara will provide technical assistance to school-based learning teams. The direct support will be delivered to a limited number of schools in a given district for at least a full academic year. Subsequently, the ELL Network will work in collaboration with the district office on the development of a “training of trainers” approach that will then be applied in other schools to support their school improvement plans.

The particular professional development topic, and the delivery mode, will be planned jointly with the school-based learning team and is likely to include: building teacher capacity to teach academic English; assessing EL learners; using native language supports; selecting supplementary materials; working with immigrant parents; serving students in low incidence schools, and differentiated instruction for EL learners. In order to sustain the learning at the local level, follow-up activities include:

Individual Mentoring/Coaching. The ELL Network will sustain the work of the local communities of practice (learning teams) through individual mentoring and coaching at the school and classroom levels. There will be visits to districts and schools throughout the academic year to observe implementation of best practices and consult with district personnel and teachers. The visits will be conducted at the request of district or school personnel.

Internet Support. JLara Consulting will create space for on-going conversations among school learning teams via its current “ELL Network” website. Specifically, JLara Consultants will host bi-monthly webinars focused on a particular area of interest to the members; facilitate exchange of best-practice information among learning team members; and provide answers to questions posed during the webinar sessions. Other online, low-cost means of connecting network members and deepening their knowledge of best practice will be identified and made available to the members.

School Support Team

The ELL network experts will work with school support teams as mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. (2002) A range of services are provided to school support teams including: facilitating meetings related to school or district improvement; collecting organizing and analyzing data for decision-making; leading support teams; observing classrooms, and locating and recommending resources for school teams and classroom teachers.

Members of the ELL Network Team:

Julia Lara, PhD.

Julia Lara is the President of JLara Educational Consulting, LLC. She has over 30 years of experience in the field of education, K-12 and higher education. She managed numerous contracts focusing on the Education of ELL students or interventions designed to improve deliver of instruction for students in public schools. Prior to JLara Consulting, she was a Special Assistant at the office of the Deputy Mayor for Education in the District of Columbia. For over 20 years, she held various assignments at the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) including Director of the Division of State Services and Technical Assistance (SSTA), center director, program director, and senior project associate. As Director of SSTA, she supervised over 30 professional and support staff and over 12 projects. Key areas of strength include: program management, policy research, analysis and writing, fundraising, and establishing and maintaining networks of state officials, researchers, community members. Dr. Lara was the lead staff on over six projects in various content areas of education including education and assessment of ELL students, high school reform, early childhood, special education, school reform and education of students enrolled in low performing schools. Finally, Dr. Lara has written extensively on matters related to the education of English Language Learners and students enrolled in low performing schools.

Shelley Hartford

Shelley Hartford is an ESOL teacher with a background in educational policy. She has significant experience in applying best practices research at the district, school and classroom level. She has taught ESOL in elementary, secondary, and adult education settings. Ms. Hartford is an advocate for her students and for the advancement of instructional practices and school reform policies that foster positive learning experiences for English language learners. As a classroom teacher, she has a realistic understanding of the daily challenges faced by teachers and schools administrators.

Currently she works as a K-5 itinerant ESOL teacher in Anne Arundel County Public Schools. Additionally, she coordinates the ESOL Summer Academy for AACPS. Previously, she was employed in Prince George's County Public Schools, where she was a high school department chair responsible for the largest secondary ESOL program in Maryland. Ms. Hartford has experience leading professional development programs for in-service and pre-service teachers working with English language learners. Prior to entering the classroom, Ms. Hartford worked for the Council of Chief State School Officers, where her research focused on national policy issues impacting English language learners. She has also worked on ELL

research projects for the Center of Applied Linguistics and has previously served as a board member of Maryland TESOL.

Shelley Hartford has a M.Ed. in TESOL from the University of Maryland, College Park and a B.A. in French from the University of Maryland. She is currently pursuing a certificate in school administration.

