

**This report aims to help school districts deal with the challenges of newly enrolling or rapidly increasing English language learner students by offering background information and sharing the experiences of districts that have addressed similar challenges in providing services and infrastructure to support the success of English language learner students.**

## WHY THIS STUDY?

Major demographic shifts are occurring in school districts across the country as communities receive immigrants from countries around the world. Many immigrant families are settling in communities previously homogeneous in language and culture (Capps et al., 2005; Capps, Fix, & Passel, 2002; Jensen, 2006). For communities and schools that are becoming “emerging immigrant communities” (Wainer, 2004) the changes entail a learning process for all. While the immigrant adults and children learn a new language and culture for work and school, the established members of those communities learn to adapt services and skills to these newcomers.

The recent demographic changes are prompting school district administrators and teachers to introduce instructional services to support the achievement of English language learner students. A growing number of districts are looking for guidance as they encounter many new tasks and challenges in serving diverse student populations. Title III of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 requires districts to provide educational programming, testing, and other services for all students, including English language learner students, to ensure their academic success (box 1).

As the educators in these emerging English language learner communities recognize, the new demographics of the K–12 student population present challenges in the classroom and require changes to both district and school infrastructures (such as staffing, professional development, funding mechanisms, and data management). But in many cases districts have made few preparations to address the needs of students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

This report provides a context for the districts’ experiences by describing the demographic changes occurring in schools both nationally and in the region. The report informs administrators and provides a perspective on capacity building by describing steps taken by some of the districts in the

## BOX 1

### What are the legislative requirements for serving English language learners?

Under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 each child must be given the support needed to realize his or her full potential for academic success, and districts and schools are accountable for children's progress toward English language proficiency and achievement of academic standards. Title III of the law focuses on English language learner students, while Title I (which provides additional resources to assist districts in serving poor and minority students) and Title VII (which addresses the education needs of Native American children) are applicable to many students who are also English language learners. In addition, districts must comply with requirements that ensure equal access to education for all students, including English language learner students, under the Civil Rights Act.

#### The purpose of the NCLB legislation

Title III is intended to assist districts in teaching English to English language learner students and in helping them meet the same challenging state standards as other students. Title III funds are directed to the states, but 95 percent of the funds must be used locally for grants to support the instruction of English language learner students. In preparing to serve these students, district administrators should obtain guidance from their state Title III coordinator. The state education agency, for its part, must submit a plan to the U.S. Department of Education describing its

process for awarding Title III funds to districts, outlining standards and objectives for raising students' levels of English proficiency, and specifying how local education agencies will be held accountable for meeting annual measurable achievement objectives and adequate yearly progress for English language learner students.

#### Education components addressed by NCLB requirements related to English language learners

NCLB requirements for educating English language learners address several components of education, including:

*Personnel.* Districts must provide high-quality professional development to personnel to improve instruction and assessment of English language learner students. Professional development must be informed by scientifically based research that demonstrates its effectiveness in increasing children's English language proficiency or teachers' knowledge and skills.

*Instruction.* Local education agencies have the flexibility to choose the method of instructing English language learner students. Curricula must be tied to scientifically based research and demonstrated to be effective in increasing English proficiency and student achievement.

#### Assessment and accountability.

Districts are held accountable by the state education agency for making adequate yearly progress as described in Title I and for meeting all annual measurable achievement objectives as described in Title III. Districts must submit a report to the state education agency every other year that describes

the English language learner program and the progress made by students.

*Outreach.* Local education agencies must notify parents about why their child needs a specialized language instruction program. Parents have the right to choose among instructional programs if more than one type is offered and to remove their child from a program for limited English proficient children.

#### Resources for districts

The NCLB Act requires that all English language learner students engage in a full curriculum. As the typical school becomes more diverse, administrators must consider the languages and cultures of families within the school community. This may require new resources, approaches, and infrastructure.

Many resources are available to assist districts in developing plans for English language learner students. Districts in the Appalachia Region can request technical assistance in responding to NCLB requirements from the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center. Information and resources are also available from the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition. The What Works Clearinghouse has been producing a series of reports examining the research evidence on specific interventions for English language learner students. Appendix C provides links to these and other organizations that can provide guidance on effective practices and lists online resources on NCLB requirements and on the Office of Civil Rights requirements related to serving English language learner students.

region that have responded to emerging English language learner communities. The appendixes provide links to resources, identify sources of expert guidance, and list for each state in the region the districts that enroll English language learners, to support district sharing of experiences and information. The information presented is also expected to assist districts not currently enrolling English language learner students, since the demographic changes occurring in schools suggest that those districts will eventually enroll English language learner students as well.

### The immigrant population in the United States and in the Appalachia Region

Census 2000 data highlight the changing patterns in immigration in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The dispersal of immigrant populations to new areas—many of them rural—outside of traditional immigrant communities (Capps et al., 2002, 2005) has been increasing, and the proportion of immigrants moving to states with large, existing immigrant populations such as California has been declining. With these changes, “new growth” states, including three states in the Appalachia Region (Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia), are recording large gains in immigrant populations (Passel & Zimmerman, 2001; Capps et al., 2005). The pattern of increased dispersal has brought immigrants into many communities for the first time.

These population changes are expected to continue, since approximately 1 million foreign-born people enter the United States each year. Projections suggest that the number of these first-generation immigrants will rise from 25 million in 1996 to 42 million by 2025 and that first-generation and second-generation (the native-born children of the foreign-born immigrants) Americans will account for approximately one-third of the U.S. population by 2025 (Martin & Midgley, 2006).

Compared with earlier immigration patterns, today’s foreign-born populations are more likely to come from Latin America (South America, Central

America, Mexico, and the Caribbean) and Asia (Carriington & Detragiache, 1999; Migration Policy Institute, 2008; Olson, 2000; Schmidley, 2003). Immigrants from these areas account for at least one-third of recent U.S. population growth (Martin & Midgley, 2006).

Mirroring the national trend, in the Appalachia Region the two major groups of immigrants are from Latin America and Asia. There are, however, some differences by state. Latin American immigrants account for close to half (45 percent) of the foreign-born population in Tennessee, more than a third in Kentucky (37 percent) and Virginia (36 percent), and a quarter in West Virginia (23 percent). Immigrants from Asia account for 42 percent of the foreign-born population in West Virginia, 40 percent in Virginia, 31 percent in Kentucky, and 28 percent in Tennessee (Migration Policy Institute, 2008).

### Impact of demographic changes on schools

Census data indicate that more than half of foreign-born U.S. residents have a limited ability to speak English (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Within the Appalachia Region states the share of foreign-born residents with limited ability to speak English is highest in West Virginia (42 percent), followed by Virginia (38 percent), Kentucky (35 percent), and Tennessee (34 percent; U.S. Census Bureau, 2005).

While not all foreign-born immigrants have a limited ability to speak English, the foreign-born population correlates with English language learner enrollment in Appalachia Region schools,<sup>1</sup> and the characteristics of immigrant populations in a region will likely be reflected in school enrollments. However, current immigration trends alone do not fully predict the K–12 English language learner population. Approximately

**The report informs administrators and provides a perspective on capacity building by describing steps taken by some of the districts in the region that have responded to emerging English language learner communities**

three-fourths of English language learner students in grades PreK–5, and slightly more than half of these students in secondary schools, are second- or third-generation immigrants (children and grandchildren of foreign-born immigrants; Capps et al., 2005). Taken together, the demographic data suggest that the classrooms of tomorrow will be increasingly diverse and that the typical school community will include English language learner students and their families.

Districts and schools that prepare for these changes will be able to offer more effective instruction and services to their English language learner students. Such planning might enable districts and schools to avoid difficult transition periods that affect teachers, students, families, and administrators when new English language learner students enroll for the first time in a homogeneous, monolingual community. Administrators and teachers can use their experience with traditional students as a foundation for serving English language learner students. However, without experience specific to the needs of English language learner students, they will be challenged to involve the students in effective instruction and to build the needed infrastructure to support these students. Also, in districts with limited resources, administrators may find it difficult to establish priorities for the use of resources to support services for English language learner students.

### Needs within the Appalachia Region states

Recent trends suggest that English language learner enrollments in the Appalachia Region will continue to grow in coming years. The early needs assessment activities in the four Appalachia Region states identified assistance to school districts with emerging English language learner communities as a priority. State Title III coordinators indicated that it is particularly important that guidance for these districts consider on-the-ground realities. Many of the districts responding to new English language

learner enrollments are small and rural (Regional Advisory Committee–Appalachia, 2005). These districts lack the infrastructure to support services for English language learner students and often have very limited resources for building that infrastructure.

At the same time, guidance for such districts is limited (Wainer, 2004). Although there is an extensive literature on components of programs and effective practices to support learning for English language learner students, it often assumes that a mature program is in place. There is little information addressing the needs of administrators in districts just starting to enroll English language learner students, where the challenge of structuring services and building a supporting infrastructure for such students may be complicated by limited resources and a remote location, far from sources of specialized expertise.

### The goals of this report

Developing the expertise and infrastructure to serve English language learner students within a district takes time. This report aims to assist district administrators by offering background information and by sharing the experiences of districts that have addressed similar challenges in planning for services and infrastructure to support academic success for English language learner students.

This report is based on an examination of English language learner enrollment patterns in the Appalachia Region and an initial exploration of how districts in the region are responding to newly emerging English language learner communities. Three research questions drove this effort (see appendix A for details):

1. To what extent are districts within the region experiencing their first enrollments of English language learners or rapid increases in enrollments?
2. How are districts responding to emerging English language learner communities? For

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example, what needs do administrators report and what resources are they using to meet these needs?

3. What have districts learned about serving English language learner students? As districts gain experience in working with English language learner students, are there changes in how they structure or provide services for these students?

The research plan involved three types of data collection activities:

1. Analysis of multiyear state data to identify English language learner enrollment patterns and districts with new or significantly increased English language learner enrollments.
2. An examination of the literature and resources to identify materials that address the needs of districts with emerging English language learner populations and infrastructure components important in establishing services for a new English language learner student population.
3. Interviews with district and school administrators in districts that have experienced new or increased English language learner enrollments to explore administrators' perspectives on the steps taken, needs, and resources used and any changes over time in districts' responses and approaches to serving English language learner students.

This report provides examples of capacity-building steps taken by districts with emerging English language learner populations. The examples, drawn from the literature and from interviews with district and school administrators, are related to five categories of infrastructure components: personnel, instruction, administration, assessment, and outreach. The findings of the literature and the interviews are also explored in terms of a process for building district capacity to serve English language learners.<sup>2</sup>

## TO WHAT EXTENT ARE DISTRICTS EXPERIENCING NEW OR RAPID INCREASES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER ENROLLMENTS?

The term *English language learner* refers to a student whose primary or only language is a language other than English and whose level of proficiency in English is not sufficient to support learning in a regular English language classroom.

The NCLB Act of 2001 refers to such students as *limited English proficient students*, a term that has been used in legislation for many years. *English language learner*, however, is becoming more common for referring to students who require assistance and support in

the classroom until they achieve the level of English proficiency that is needed to fully participate in academic tasks and instruction in all-English classrooms. Proficiency in academic English is critical. Many students who appear fluent in everyday conversations may have very limited ability to understand and communicate in English in content-area classes (August & Hakuta, 1997; Cummins, 1991).

**This report provides examples of capacity-building steps taken by districts with emerging English language learner populations, drawn from the literature and from interviews**

### How are English language learner students identified for services?

States and districts vary in how they identify students as English language learners and at what point students are no longer considered English language learners (Zehler et al., 2003; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). Typically, a home language survey is used to identify students who speak a language other than English in the home. Various assessment tools (including achievement tests, literacy tests, teacher judgment, writing samples, and tests in the native language) are used to determine whether there is a need for specialized English language learner services. Students who are identified as English language learners are assessed annually



for continued eligibility for English language learner services. Most commonly, oral English proficiency and classroom performance or grades are key factors in determining when a student no longer needs English language learner services. Other factors frequently include literacy and achievement tests in English, teacher judgment, writing samples, and teacher ratings of oral proficiency tests in the native language (Zehler et al., 2003).

But achieving full proficiency in English is a long process that continues after exit from English language learner status. It can take several years for English language learner students to achieve the proficiency level needed to support academic success to their full potential (Garcia, 2000; Collier, 1987). These students must learn both the academic content and the vocabulary and academic language skills required for communi-

cating that content, while building the vocabulary and language skills needed to bring them closer to the level of a native English speaker.

The challenge for students and schools is even greater for English language learner students who

enroll at the middle or high school levels with only a few years of prior schooling or with interrupted schooling. Some will enroll with limited content knowledge and literacy skills in their own language, making the transition to learning in English even more difficult (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007).

How many English language learners are enrolled, and how many languages are spoken?

Approximately 5.1 million English language learner students from more than 350 language backgrounds are enrolled in grades PreK–12 in public schools in the United States (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition & Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2007). Spanish was the primary language of

about 77 percent of English language learner students in the 2001/02 school year (Zehler et al., 2003). Spanish-speaking students constitute the majority of English language learner students in the Appalachia Region as well—close to two-thirds overall. Other languages of the more than 100 spoken by English language learners in the region include Arabic, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, Chinese, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Urdu, and Vietnamese.

The numbers of English language learner students nationally and within the Appalachia Region states continue to increase. Nationally, between 1995/96 and 2005/06 the number of English language learner students in grades PreK–12 increased 57 percent while the overall K–12 population increased 3.7 percent (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2007). The growth and increased dispersal of the English language learner population has meant an increase in the number of districts enrolling English language learner students—and an increase in the number that anticipate enrolling these students in the near future.

This demographic change has been evident in school enrollments in the four Appalachia Region states. In 2004/05 English language learner students accounted for 5.6 percent of K–12 enrollment in Virginia, 2.1 percent in Tennessee, 1.8 percent in Kentucky, and 0.4 percent in West Virginia (table 1; National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2006b). These proportions are growing. All four states have experienced substantial increases in English language learner enrollments. Between 1998/99 and 2004/05 the increases ranged from 94 percent for West Virginia to 315 percent for Kentucky, while during the same period total student enrollment increased less than 10 percent or declined.

Kentucky and Tennessee are among the states identified as “new growth” states—states with the fastest-growing foreign-born populations in the 1990s that were not traditional destination states for immigrants (Capps et al., 2002; Capps et al.,

**The numbers of English language learner students nationally and within the Appalachia Region states continue to increase**

TABLE 1

**Total and English language learner student K–12 enrollments in Appalachia Region states, 1998/99 and 2004/05**

State	1998/99			2004/05			Change, 1998/99–2004/05 (percent)	
	All students	English language learner students		All students	English language learner students		All students	English language learner students
		Number	Percent		Number	Percent		
Kentucky	623,570	2,693	0.4	636,880	11,181	1.8	2.1	315.2
Tennessee	885,848	9,191	0.1	941,097	19,355	2.1	6.2	110.6
Virginia	1,124,022	26,779	2.4	1,203,847	67,933	5.6	7.1	153.7
West Virginia	296,559	638	0.2	280,371	1,236	0.4	–5.4	93.7

Source: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2006b.

2005; Martin & Midgley, 2006; Passel & Zimmerman, 2001). Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia are among states with a greater than 50 percent increase in children of immigrants 1990–2000 (Capps et al., 2005).

Districts in these three states have experienced very rapid expansion of their immigrant populations as a result of both internal and external migration. And in West Virginia, despite its much smaller English language learner population, several districts are experiencing increases in English language learner students as immigrant populations have been moving to new areas within the state. Thus, within many districts across the Appalachia Region both administrators and teachers are encountering new challenges related to the changing demographics of their student populations.

District enrollment data were analyzed to identify districts that were either enrolling their first English language learner students or experiencing at least a 50 percent increase in such students (as a proportion of the total enrollment in the district; see appendix A). For the three states for which multiyear data were available, 29 percent of Kentucky districts, 21 percent of Virginia districts, and 25 percent of West Virginia districts met one of those criteria within a single year. And all three states had a larger number of districts that experienced first-time English language learner

enrollment or a 50 percent increase in English language learner enrollment in 2004/05 than in 2001/02. This pattern was most pronounced for West Virginia, which had 6 such districts in 2001/02 and 14 in 2004/05 (and as many as 17 in 2003/04).

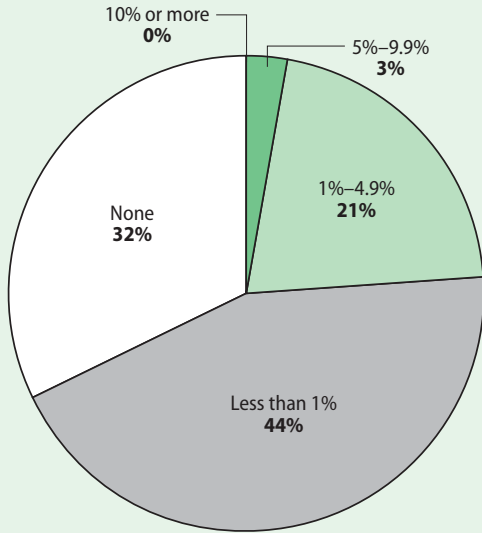
These analyses of English language learner student enrollments thus confirm that many districts across the region are experiencing emerging English language learner communities.

#### How are English language learners distributed across districts in the Appalachia Region states?

There are wide variations in English language learner enrollments across districts within each state (figures 1–4; table B1 in appendix B). Table 2 shows the mean number of English language learner students for districts. Appendix tables B2–B5 in appendix B list the districts within each state in each category.<sup>3</sup>

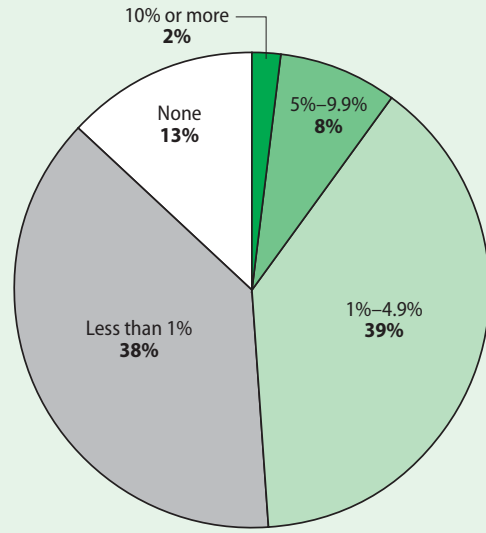
The geographic distribution of districts with English language learner students within each state in the region is shown in maps 1–4 (adapted from U.S. Census Bureau state maps). The maps indicate census regional divisions, including counties and independent cities as appropriate. These maps show that English language learner students are widely dispersed across the Appalachia Region states.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Kentucky districts: English language learner population as a proportion of total enrollment, 2004/05**



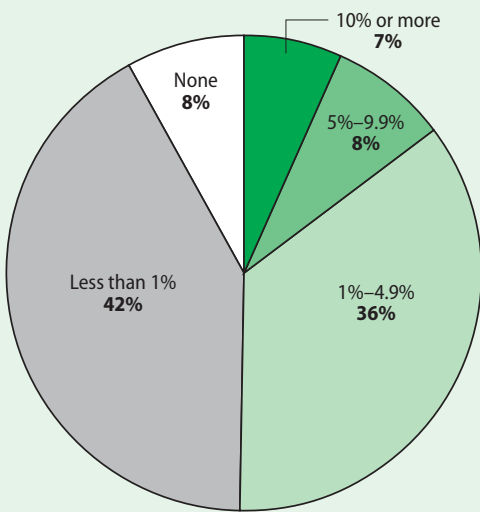
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2007.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Tennessee districts: English language learner population as a proportion of total enrollment, 2004/05**



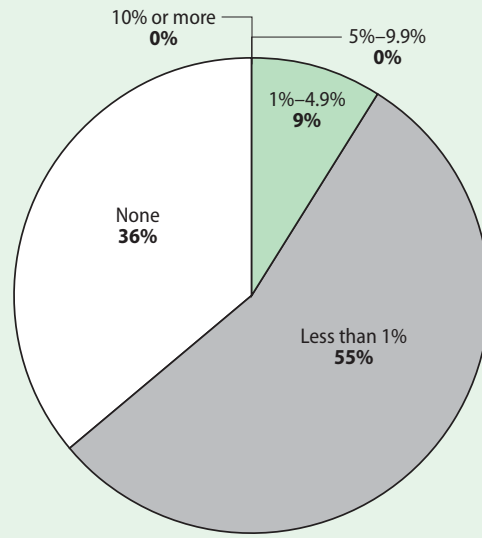
Source: Tennessee Department of Education, 2006, 2007.

**FIGURE 3**  
**Virginia districts: English language learner population as a proportion of total enrollment, 2005/06**



Note: Numbers do not sum to 100 because of rounding.  
 Source: Virginia Department of Education, 2006.

**FIGURE 4**  
**West Virginia districts: English language learner population as a proportion of total enrollment, 2004/05**



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2007.



TABLE 2

**Mean English language learner enrollment by level of English language learner representation in districts in Appalachia Region states**

English language learner representation in district (percent of total enrollment)	Kentucky, 2004/05 (176 districts)		Tennessee, 2004/05 (136 districts)		Virginia, 2005/06 (132 districts)		West Virginia, 2004/05 (55 districts)	
	Number of districts	Mean number of English language learners	Number of districts	Mean number of English language learners	Number of districts	Mean number of English language learners	Number of districts	Mean number of English language learners
Less than 1 percent	77	15	52	19	55	19	30	16
1.0–4.9	36	216	53	257	48	268	5	258
5.0–9.9	6	257	11	875	10	643	0	na
10 percent or more <sup>a</sup>	0	na	3	296	9	5,782 <sup>b</sup>	0	na
Total number of districts with English language learners enrolled	119	88	119	211	122	593	35	51

na is not applicable.

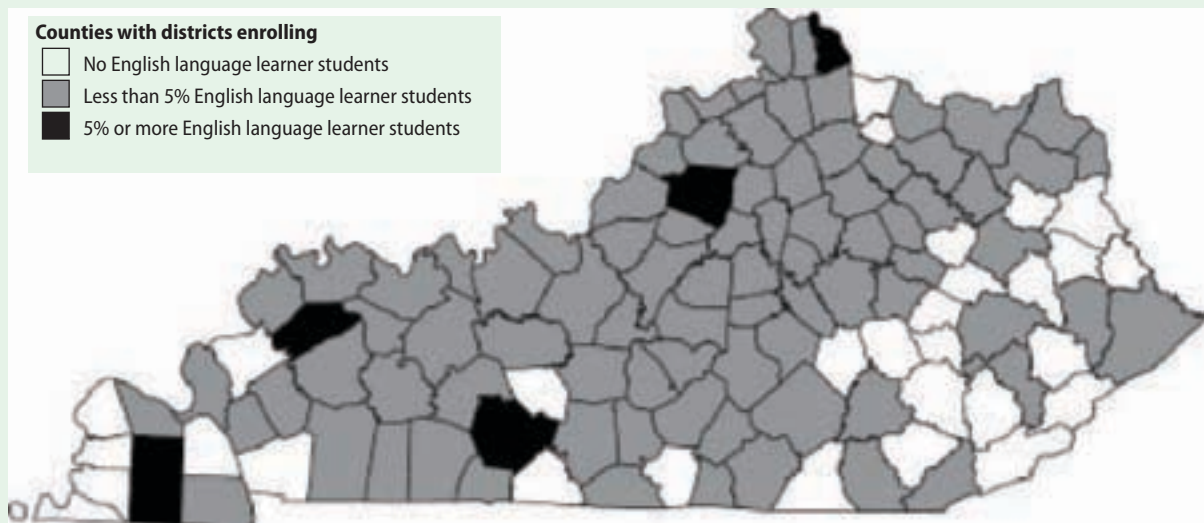
a. The highest percentages within any district are 9.4 percent in Kentucky, 38.4 percent in Tennessee, 36.2 percent in Virginia, and 4.3 percent in West Virginia.

b. The high mean reported for Virginia is attributable largely to one district, Fairfax County, which enrolled 30,032 English language learner students in 2005/06. Prince William County, with 9,831 English language learner students, enrolled the next largest population.

Source: Tennessee Department of Education, 2006, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2007 for Kentucky, West Virginia; Virginia Department of Education, 2006.

MAP 1

**Distribution of districts with English language learner students in Kentucky, 2004/05**



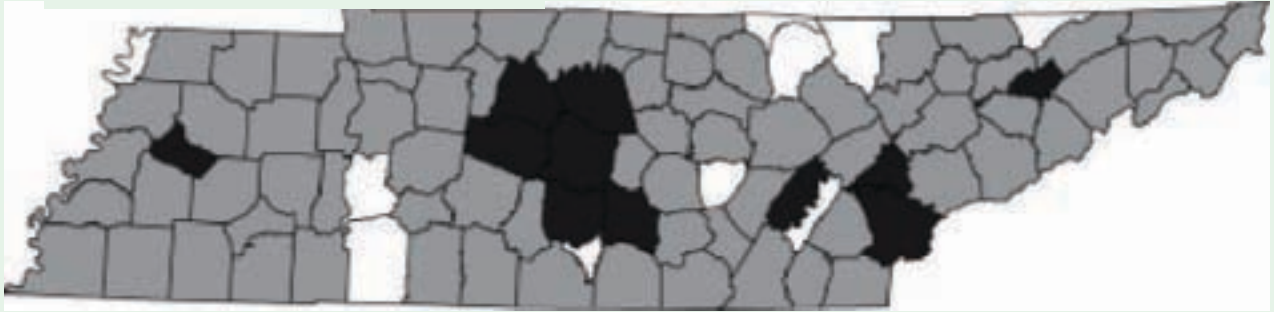
Note: The map shows county boundaries for Kentucky. Each county includes one or more school districts.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2007.

MAP 2

**Distribution of districts with English language learner students in Tennessee, 2004/05****Counties with districts enrolling**

- No English language learner students
- Less than 5% English language learner students
- 5% or more English language learner students



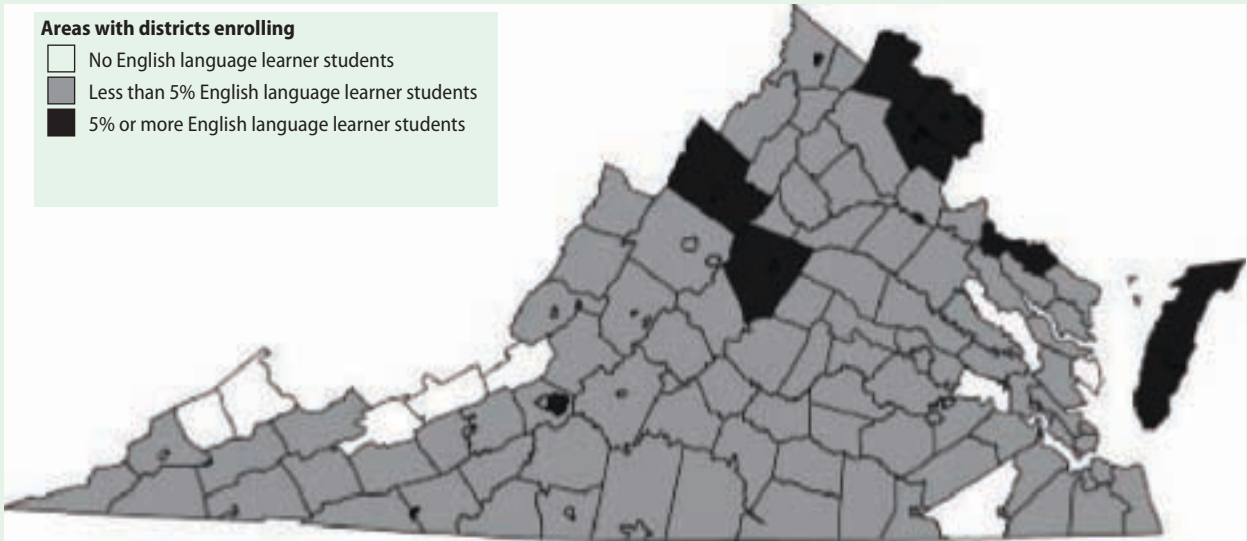
*Note:* The map shows county boundaries for Tennessee. Each county includes one or more districts.

*Source:* Tennessee Department of Education, 2006, 2007.

MAP 3

**Distribution of districts with English language learner students in Virginia, 2005/06****Areas with districts enrolling**

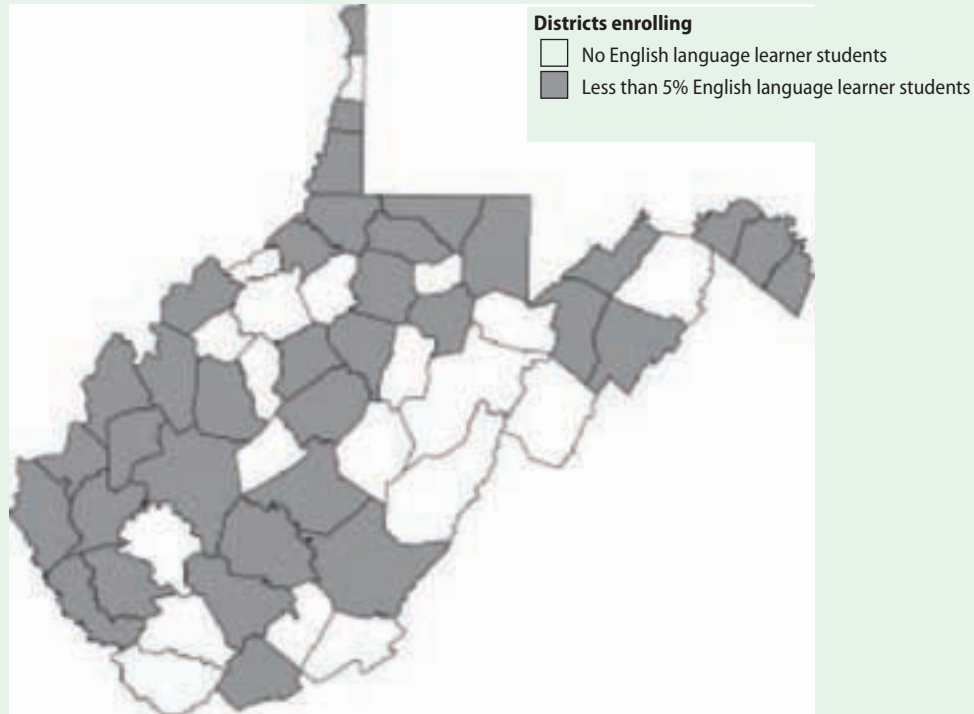
- No English language learner students
- Less than 5% English language learner students
- 5% or more English language learner students



*Note:* The map shows county and independent city boundaries for Virginia. As of 2005/06, most of the 135 counties and independent cities operated single school districts; however, there are exceptions to this pattern, resulting in a total of 132 school districts. The exceptions are: Bedford (city) students, served by Bedford County schools; Clifton Forge (city) students, served by Alleghany County schools; Emporia (city) students, served by Greensville County schools; Fairfax (city) students, served by Fairfax County schools; Williamsburg (city) and James City County students, served by the same district; and the towns of Colonial Beach and West Point, which operate their own school districts.

*Source:* Virginia Department of Education, 2006.

MAP 4

**Distribution of districts with English language learner students in West Virginia, 2004/05**

*Note:* The map shows county boundaries for West Virginia. Each county includes one school district.

*Source:* U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2007.

## HOW ARE DISTRICTS RESPONDING TO EMERGING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER COMMUNITIES?

For a district enrolling its first English language learner students and just starting to build capacity to serve these students, assessing and putting into place all the components of effective services can be a daunting task. The resources, expertise, and infrastructure will not be available immediately. For district and school administrators the challenges are to identify priorities in establishing services, to determine how to best use existing resources in meeting those priorities, and to implement practices that will build capacity to effectively address the needs of English language learner students. This section discusses preparing to serve English language learner students and explores the multiple components involved in building the capacity to do so.

### The challenges for districts

District and school administrators in emerging English language learner communities are facing challenges that require a coordinated and comprehensive response if English language learner students are to be given the best opportunity to succeed. Yet, as an educator quoted by Wainer (2004) noted, “The main block is not knowing what to do. . . . The change has been so incredibly rapid.” These districts face three primary challenges: understanding English language learner students, understanding how to respond to rising English language learner enrollments, and adapting to the pace of change.

#### *Understanding the students and their experience.*

Where English language learner students are new to a community, staff in district offices and schools will be challenged to understand the background,

**Districts face three primary challenges: understanding English language learner students, understanding how to respond to rising English language learner enrollments, and adapting to the pace of change**

language, and culture of these students. This can be an issue at the first point of contact, the enrollment process. Communication can be an immediate problem if there is no one with the family to interpret or translate. Even if there is, cultural differences can confuse the enrollment process. For example, understanding naming conventions is important to ensure that students' names

are entered correctly and consistently throughout the record-keeping system. (Marcus, Adger, and Arteagoitia, 2007, provide guidance for registration staff and district student information system staff on dealing with these issues.) Administrative staff and teachers need to understand what it means to be learning a second language while also learning academic content. Similarly, when the English language learner student enrollees are immigrants new to the United States, it is important to recognize that they and their parents are also learning how to live in a new community and culture. This may be particularly difficult for those with experiences that have continuing emotional and health repercussions.

*Understanding how to respond to English language learner enrollments.* An administrator in a district with an emerging English language learner community will need to set priorities as the district begins establishing procedures for providing services to enrolling English language learner students. The literature offers a wide range of information on characteristics of effective instructional programs. However, guidance is needed on the beginning steps in building an effective program for English language learner students and the types of decisions to be made. This will be challenging, particularly when local resources and infrastructure to support services are limited.

*Adapting to the pace of change.* The rapid pace at which many districts have undergone demographic change adds to the challenge. A district and school may face a significant challenge as

the first English language learner student enrolls unexpectedly. It is an entirely different challenge when the one or two initial English language learner enrollees are followed, say, by another 17 English language learner enrollees the next week.

For school districts in Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia the growth in English language learner student populations has been rapid, with substantial changes from one year to the next. For example, from 1994/95 to 2004/05, 105 (86 percent) of Virginia's 122 districts with English language learner students experienced at least one year in which the English language learner population as a proportion of total enrollment in the district increased by at least 50 percent over the previous year. One in four of Virginia's districts with English language learner students experienced such increases three or more times over that 10-year period, an indication of the dynamic change occurring in the region. Although parallel data for the period were not available for the other Appalachia Region states, district-level data on English language learner enrollments for recent years suggest a similar pattern of ongoing change (appendix A describes the data sources, methodology, and analyses).

Such changes can have a large impact on schools even when the number of English language learner students is small. West Virginia has a relatively small English language learner population, but the students are moving into new areas, and individual districts have experienced substantial increases. One West Virginia district that enrolled only 3 English language learner students in 2000/01 had 60 English language learner students by 2004/05, with the increase occurring over two years. The 60 English language learner students represent less than 1 percent of student enrollment in the district, but such rapid changes have a major impact on both schools and classrooms, with implications for all aspects of the education infrastructure. Far smaller English language learner enrollments present similar challenges, since each English language learner student must be assured of a challenging and high-quality curriculum.

Whether there are 5 or 50 students, the teachers and staff must understand how to effectively involve the students in instruction and promote each student's development of English proficiency and achievement of academic content standards.

### District responses to the enrollment of English language learners

Districts without prior experience or training in working with English language learner students face challenges in addressing these students' needs. The challenges may be especially daunting for districts in areas remote from key resources. State education agency administrators in the Appalachia Region note that many of their districts are enrolling English language learner students for the first time and need information. The needs are particularly acute in that many are small and rural districts that are more likely to have limited

resources and infrastructure to support English language learner services.

Information was collected on the experiences of districts enrolling English language learner students for the first time and of those experiencing large and rapid increases in the numbers of English language learner students. This effort included examination of the literature focused on districts in emerging English language learner communities and interviews with a limited number of district and school administrators in the Appalachia Region.<sup>4</sup> (See box 2 and appendix A for more information on the research methodology).

The purpose of the literature review and the interviews was to describe some of the experiences of staff in schools and district offices as they work with existing infrastructure and resources to meet the needs of their changing student population.

#### BOX 2

### Literature review and interviews

Information was collected on the experiences of districts enrolling new or significantly increased English language learners through literature reviews and interviews with district and school administrators.

#### Literature reviews

Relevant literature sources were identified through searches of databases, key resource center and clearinghouse web sites, and examinations of the reference lists of key documents. The literature review included database searches focused on documents from 1990 to the present. The 14 relevant documents that were identified include case study descriptions of districts or schools and guidance documents. A limited number of documents were found that addressed the experience of districts newly enrolling English

language learner students. Appendix A lists the documents included in the review and their key characteristics.

#### Interviews

Nine interviews were conducted with district and school administrators responsible for English language learner services to gain further insight into the needs, resources, and capacity-building histories of districts and schools that had experienced English language learner enrollments for the first time or a rapid increase in enrollments. The districts were identified through data analysis or by nomination by the state education agency coordinator. Schools were identified by nomination by the district respondent. The districts include four rural districts and two districts classified as urban fringe areas, based on the geographic classifications used in the National Center for Education Statistics. Total enrollments in the

districts ranged from 3,883 to 28,104 students, and enrollments of English language learner students ranged from 100 to 474. From 1 to as many as 34 language groups were represented in the districts, although the predominant language was Spanish for all but one district. (Appendix A provides details on the respondents and on the districts they represent).

The interviews were conducted to gain insight into how districts had responded to a new English language learner population, the needs they had identified, and the resources they had used at different stages in working with English language learner students. Although limited in number and scope, the conversations with the district and school administrators revealed the paths traveled by district and school staff in building greater capacity to serve English language learner students.



The findings reported here are not intended as recommendations but as part of an exploration of how districts respond to the challenge of new student and teacher needs. The information is organized by components of services (infrastructure components). The amount of information is uneven across these components, with limited examples for some components and more details for others. These differences may be informative as well, in that they reflect what has been highlighted in the literature and perhaps reflect varying areas of focus among the interview respondents.

### Key components of services that support academic success

Districts that have not anticipated enrollment of English language learners typically take ad hoc steps, using existing resources to define a set of services for the new students. As these districts develop responses to English language learner enrollments, they build an infrastructure of support. Academic success for English language learner students depends on a number of components that, once combined, enable effective instruction when offered within a context of support and high expectations and implemented with careful attention to student outcomes in relation to the instructional and other services provided to each student.

*The role of infrastructure in building a system of response.* Often, a first element to consider for English language learner services is instruction—what to provide and how to provide it. There are many resources on this topic. However, a focus on classroom instruction alone is not sufficient. Without adequate infrastructure to support instruction, students are less likely to succeed (Wainer, 2004). Thus, the goal in examining the literature and conducting interviews was to develop an understanding of district responses to the English language learner populations in terms of the infrastructure components involved and the relative priorities attached to these components.

*Infrastructure components.* The term *infrastructure* here refers to the various elements of the overall

system needed to provide services to meet the needs of English language learner students. Infrastructure is generally understood as “a set of interconnected structural elements that provide the framework supporting an entire structure” (Infrastructure, 2007).

Thus, this review began by identifying infrastructure components applied to services for English language learner students. A list of 15 components of services was constructed and then organized into five categories (table 3).

Many of the components have been addressed in depth within the field, and information is available from a range of resources. However, discussions of services for English language learner students often assume a context in which a program is already in place, with a variety of resources at hand. Districts with emerging English language learner communities often develop services in a context where access to resources is more difficult or unavailable (certified English as a second language or bilingual specialists may be lacking in a region or sources of coursework material and professional development may be distant and not easily accessed). Thus, the focus in this effort was on district additions to or

TABLE 3

**Infrastructure categories and components of services for English language learner students**

Category	Component
Personnel	Leadership structures Staffing Professional development
Instruction	Instructional services Curriculum Materials
Administration	Registration Funding mechanisms Data/data management
Assessment	Identification Language proficiency/academic achievement
Outreach	Students Parents Community Social services

Source: Authors' analysis based on data described in text.



adaptations of existing infrastructure in response to their new English language learner population and on paths taken toward building increased capacity for serving English language learner students.

### Building capacity in districts with emerging English language learner communities

Organized under the 5 categories and 15 infrastructure components listed in table 3, examples from the literature and the interviews with administrators are presented below, showing how districts are responding to emerging English language learner communities. For many of the components the findings are descriptive only, providing examples of steps taken by districts. In some cases, however, the literature and the interviews appear to reflect a consensus of practice and opinion. For example, the establishment of a clear leadership structure was identified as important in both the literature and the interviews.<sup>5</sup>

#### Personnel

**Leadership.** An individual, or leadership committee, should be tasked with taking the lead on developing a program for English language learner students, according to both the literature review and the interviews.

#### Examples from the literature

- *Designating a teacher with an interest or relevant background in English language learner instruction as responsible for leading the program.* In a rural school district in Virginia discussed in Wrigley (2000), a curriculum specialist with no experience in English as a second language (ESL) instruction, but who was willing to learn, took the lead in administering the district ESL program. As a result of her efforts the program became a model for other rural districts in the state.
- *Establishing strong and positive leadership.* In a guide for rural districts with a low

proportion of English language learner students, Hill and Flynn (2004) emphasize the importance of strong leadership with a positive “can do” approach. The authors point out that positive leadership sets the stage for acceptance and focused problem-solving. They note that this is an important first step, particularly when the local community has been ethnically homogeneous and has had little experience with people from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds. A positive approach modeled by administrators and program leadership is also noted in the New York University, Metro Center for Urban Education (2001) report as an important element in successfully planning and implementing services for English language learner students at both district and school levels.

**The establishment of a clear leadership structure was identified as important in both the literature and the interviews**

- *Formally identifying services for English language learners as part of a designated administrator’s responsibility.* The New York University, Metro Center for Urban Education (2001) report advises district administrators to identify a lead person early on to take responsibility for gathering information and developing a program.
- *Building a formal leadership structure to counsel and advise the district.* Some districts have started out by building a leadership structure for their English language learner programs (Brunn, 2000; Hill & Flynn, 2004; Wrigley, 2000). A rural district in Wyoming formed an advisory council that included representatives from the district and schools as well as staff from Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (Hill & Flynn, 2004). The mission of the council was to

increase its knowledge of the district's legal obligations to English language learner students and to detail the district's policies on English language learner students. Similarly, a rural district in Illinois that experienced a rapid increase in enrollments of K–12 English language learner students established a steering committee of representative stakeholders (students, parents, and teachers) to draft a document outlining principles and beliefs on education to guide practice (Brunn, 2000).

*Voices from the interviews.* For most districts program staffing begins with designating one person as the lead on developing services for English language learner students. In some cases this was a district Title I or other administrator; in other cases it was someone with relevant skills—for example, with a background in linguistics or Spanish. The motivation and energy of this lead person are important in determining what is learned about serving English language learner students and what steps are taken. For example, one administrator, once assigned responsibility for the English language learner program, began reading and attending conferences and learning about English language learner students and instructional approaches to address their needs so that she could share the information with the teachers.

*Staffing.* Identifying teachers with the appropriate training and certification for working with English language learner students is essential, according to the literature review. But the interviews show that staffing is a difficult component to address in many of the districts receiving new English language learner populations.

#### *Examples from the literature*

- *Making optimum use of local resources.* Strategies for staffing a program include

using as many local resources as possible (Bérubé, 2000). The guide developed by Bérubé describes approaches to staffing and professional development that consider situations in which there is a scarcity of qualified bilingual and ESL staff. Bérubé includes a list of organizations to contact in advertising for teachers in order to fully draw on potential candidates in a local area. He also discusses the roles of paraprofessionals and administrators and refers to mainstream teachers as having a critical role in the instruction of English language learner students.

- *“Growing” a qualified staff for English language learner services from within the district.* Hill and Flynn (2004) mention professional development options, such as opportunities for staff to earn college credit by attending workshops on language and literacy development. Such opportunities could lead to endorsement or certification specific to working with English language learner students. Murry and Herrera (1998) refer to district funding for teachers and administrators to obtain ESL endorsement as a way to build district staffing resources.

*Voices from the interviews.* The district administrators reported on the difficulties of identifying instructional staff and described strategies for resolving them. One strategy is to look more closely at resources in the community, to maximize the use of locally available staffing resources. In one district the foreign-born spouse of a classroom teacher with certification for teaching English as a foreign language assisted as an ESL teacher. Another district identified a parent with training in education who had been an English language learner student in her early teens and hired her to assist as a liaison and paraprofessional. More than one district identified classroom teachers who were eager to include English language learner students in their classes

**Identifying teachers with the appropriate training and certification for working with English language learner students is essential**

or at least were comfortable doing so. Other means of maximizing local resources included identifying foreign language teachers who might serve as resources for communication, including translation; identifying other people in the extended school community who might have knowledge of other languages or cultures (such as a spouse of a teacher, a parent of a student); and identifying and using any available translation skills in the community to speak with parents when they visit the school or to assist at a parent meeting.

Other approaches mentioned were various strategies for “growing staff from within” that provided support for teachers and other staff to take on additional coursework toward bilingual or ESL endorsement. The administrators noted that difficulties in hiring qualified staff often mean too few staff in relation to growing needs, with the result that an ESL teacher may be constantly traveling between schools, with little time to consult with classroom teachers.

*Professional development.* Teachers have a stronger foundation for working with English language learner students when they understand the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the students, patterns in second language acquisition, the students’ specific education needs (such as level of prior schooling and first language literacy skills), and strategies for involving their English language learner students in meaningful ways in instructional activities.

#### *Examples from the literature*

- *Providing ongoing, long-term professional development and support.* Hill and Flynn (2004) discuss the importance of long-term professional development approaches and the need to support and encourage collaboration among ESL and mainstream teachers. In the district they studied, the district leadership team worked with the technical assistance

provider to develop a year-long plan for professional development for all administrators and teachers in the district, including mainstream and ESL teachers.

They chose a half-day training format so that substitute teachers and teacher release time could be used effectively. Murry and Herrera (1998) point out that the long-term, self-directed approach to professional development taken by Kansas State University (see below) offered some unexpected benefits, such as an increase in district funding for participation of teachers and administrators in the program for ESL endorsement.

- *Using technology-based distance education models of professional development.* Murry and Herrera (1998) outline an innovative, video-based distance-learning approach used by Kansas State University to provide professional development to teachers in geographically isolated districts. The program included direct and extended instructor-participant contacts and a variety of ways to provide feedback to participants, such as email lists, email, and a toll-free phone line. The approach was long-term and self-directed. The video sessions provided ample opportunities for direct interaction with colleagues about common interests and concerns in professional practice. While the specific technology (video-based) is being supplanted by newer, web-based approaches, the principles of practice demonstrated remain valid, and participants reported these sessions to be very useful.
- *Involving all teachers and staff in professional development sessions and*

**Teachers have a stronger foundation for working with English language learner students when they understand the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the students**

*opportunities.* Hill and Flynn (2004) point out that it is important to include all staff in professional development, not just ESL instructors, since English language learner students often spend most of their instructional time in mainstream classrooms.

- *Employing a variety of models of professional development.* Wainer (2004) refers to a range of innovative strategies for teacher training. Examples include peer-teaching, in which an ESL teacher coaches a content-area teacher, and comprehensive courses on working with English language learner students for all content-area teachers. Such courses would include second language acquisition, district policy, identification of English language learner students, impact of culture, strategies for instruction, and information on how to access online information on instruction of English language learner students. In Gwinnett County, Georgia, for example, all teachers receive an intensive series of professional development sessions related to working with English language learner students (Hamann, 2003).
- *Providing opportunities for teachers to become familiar with students' homes, community backgrounds, and experiences.* In the Georgia project described by Hamann (2003), professional development for instructors included a summer institute in Mexico and opportunities to view the communities from which their

students had originally come. The participants viewed the experience as extremely useful and motivating. Wainer (2004) describes innovative strategies in professional development that address the potential for discrimination. These include involving staff in training and role-playing to increase understanding of the experience of immigrant

students and developing opportunities for multicultural awareness, such as interaction among immigrant groups in the district and school and among staff and students in the school (including holding international dinners and embedding information about culture in instruction).

*Voices from the interviews.* Professional development was acknowledged as very important across the districts. Several respondents recounted their early efforts to learn and share information about their newly arrived English language learner students. They described various efforts to collect professional development information in the very earliest stages of their districts' experience in working with English language learner students.

In some districts professional development began as simply providing copies of information on English language learner students and their instruction to teachers with English language learner students in their classes. In one district the lead person for the English language learner program conducted research on English language learner students, summarized the information, and placed copies of the information into the mailboxes of teachers working with English language learner students. In another district the coordinator summarized the information she gathered from reading newsletters and other sources of information and from sessions at local conferences so that she could pass on the information to the classroom teachers.

In another case consultants were hired to work with an initial group of students for six weeks and then to provide assistance and technical support to a part-time teacher designated as the lead for English language learner services.

Some districts offered stipends to teachers who took coursework toward endorsement. One district without nearby universities or colleges to offer professional development

**One district without nearby universities or colleges to offer professional development provided training to mainstream teachers through an online university course**

provided training to mainstream teachers through an online university course. Another district obtained licenses for access to an online mini-course providing basic information for teachers on working with English language learner students.

In another district the administrator noted that more formal professional development approaches were put into place as numbers grew and teachers began to feel increasingly challenged and frustrated by the need for assistance on how best to work with their English language learner students.

Several respondents emphasized the importance of contacting local professional organizations and conferences and of networking with other districts with similar challenges. These connections were described as extremely helpful and in some cases “eye-opening.” One respondent described how the first conference she attended taught her how teachers could improve their interactions with students by gaining understanding of the students’ culture. She was able to inform classroom teachers about how to make changes in ways that they perceived as very helpful to themselves and to students. Professional development efforts also included tasking ESL resource teachers to work with classroom teachers to support instruction.

### Instruction

**Instructional services.** A program for instruction of English language learner students comprises not only specialized assistance from an ESL or bilingual specialist teacher but also high-quality instruction when the student is taught within mainstream settings (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004; Hill & Flynn, 2006; Francis et al., 2006a,b,c; George Washington University, 1996).

#### *Examples from the literature*

- *Selecting a program that takes into account available staffing resources.* An issue

common to several districts concerned the selection of an instructional program relative to the resources available in the district. In many small or rural and remote districts finding ESL teachers and bilingual paraprofessionals can be a great challenge. The district may have to make program choices that can be implemented with the staff at hand. Faced with this challenge, a rural school district in Wyoming described by Hill and Flynn (2004) adopted the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (Echevarria et al., 2004), a research-based instructional model used by mainstream teachers to teach both English and academic content to English language learner students. Teachers use instructional strategies that help students learn academic content and build English proficiency (such as cooperative learning and graphic organizers).

**A program for instruction of English language learner students comprises specialized assistance from an ESL or bilingual specialist teacher and high-quality instruction in mainstream settings**

- *Developing programs designed to ease the transition of immigrants into the schools.* Wainer (2004) notes that some areas with newly emerging immigrant communities are experimenting with newcomer centers for adolescent immigrant students. While these centers have received positive reviews from teachers and students, he notes that evidence is still lacking of their effectiveness in moving students into the mainstream. Chang (1990) provides a detailed discussion of key elements that help make newcomer programs and other education interventions responsive to the needs of English language learner students. Such elements include a comprehensive and centralized intake process, with links to health and social services as



well as assessment and placement; clear entry and exit criteria for the program; flexible program structure to accommodate mid-year entry; a curriculum that values and incorporates students' cultures, languages, and experiences; and teachers, support staff, and administrators with the training and experience to understand and address the needs of newcomers.

*Voices from the interviews.* District administrators reported using a variety of approaches and materials. Several reported a focus on pull-out ESL instruction and efforts to support collaboration between ESL teachers and mainstream teachers. While most instructional services are provided by pull-out sessions, there are also “push-in” approaches, in which an ESL specialist assists in instructing English language learner students within the classroom. In providing instruction to English language learner students, several respondents referred to the need to make students feel comfortable and to help students understand school routines and expectations. In one high school experiencing a larger influx of English language learner

students, the program coordinator is planning a team-taught class in English language arts (taught by an English language arts teacher and an ESL teacher).

Respondents also identified other strategies, including identifying teachers with an interest in having English language learner students in the class and placing new English language learner students in classrooms with another Eng-

lish language learner student or pairing an English language learner student with a more proficient English language learner student.

*Curriculum.* Curricula for English language learners provide a foundation for academic success when they are designed to ensure adequate

progress toward both academic proficiency in English and achievement of content standards.

*Examples from the literature.* Hill and Flynn (2004) emphasize the importance of choosing an ESL curriculum that addresses the needs of English language learner students for explicit language development activities, such as daily exercises to build oral language proficiency and develop literacy skills, including vocabulary development activities and explicit grammar instruction.

*Voices from the interviews.* An administrator described the transition in the school from a focus on promoting their students' growth in English language proficiency to a dual focus on language and academic content objectives. The staff recognized that they needed to set academic goals for their English language learners from the very beginning so that the students would have the foundation they needed for success in later grades.

Some administrators reported using computer software for English language learning as a key element in the curriculum for English language learner students.

*Materials.* Until English language learner students achieve full academic proficiency in English, they will require materials developed for English language learner students or that support English language learner student use. Teachers will also need to become skilled in applying instructional methods that make standard content and materials more accessible to English language learner students.

*Examples from the literature.* One strategy for identifying materials is to ask districts experienced in working with English language learner students for recommendations and perhaps to arrange to borrow sample materials. Another strategy is to use publishers' examination copies and to visit publisher booths at conferences (Mid-Continent

**Curricula for English language learners provide a foundation for academic success when they are designed to ensure adequate progress toward both academic proficiency in English and achievement of content standards**



Comprehensive Center, 2005). Creating a district or school library of English language learner resources can increase access to materials for staff across a district (New York University, Metro Center for Education, 2001).

*Voices from the interviews.* Administrators described their efforts to obtain materials for English language learner students as initially piecemeal in approach. Later, their efforts became more focused on ensuring a consistent and coherent set of materials for students at different proficiency levels and across grades. One respondent referred to a library that the district had been creating over several years as a source of materials and resources; another mentioned how useful it was to attend a conference and review the publishers' exhibits. Other administrators referred to the use of computer-based instructional software and web-based instructional activities.

### Administration

*Registration.* Registration involves gathering information on prior education, including translating transcripts from other countries, and applying consistent procedures to identify students who should be assessed for eligibility for English language learner programs. Thus new policies and procedures may be needed to ensure that registration staff are informed about working with English language learner students and their families, that procedures are in place to ensure consistent data collection, and that translation support is available when needed. When naming conventions in the student's language and culture differ from those of English, registration procedures should include consistent practices for entering student names into forms and databases. (See Marcus et al., 2007, for a guide on naming conventions developed for districts in the Appalachia Region.)

*Voices from the interviews.* District administrators referred to the need to establish consistent registration procedures for newly arriving English language learner students

across staff and across schools. Initially, many districts used ad hoc approaches to register the small numbers of English language learner students arriving. However, as the numbers grew, administrators recognized the need for formal procedures that were consistent across sites. One coordinator mentioned implementation of a home language survey for all students each year to ensure that all students who should be assessed for English language learner services would be included. This enabled the district to identify other English language learner students in the schools who had not been identified previously. One administrator referred to the need for assistance in translating transcripts, mentioning that she had been able to obtain district resources for this.

**New policies and procedures may be needed to ensure that registration staff are informed about working with English language learner students and their families**

*Funding.* Districts with new populations of English language learner students will not have funding sources in place to support the development work and services to be provided and so will need to identify funding sources and mechanisms. Very few documents mention funding mechanisms for English language learner programs. Interview respondents were asked and some volunteered comments about funding. In smaller districts funding is frequently a concern, particularly when the English language learner group is not large enough to trigger target funding.

### Examples from the literature

- *Grant programs can sometimes provide start-up funds.* Hamann (2003) refers to grant funding obtained to support services for English language learner students as part of a coherent program within the local area that involved collaboration with the Universidad de

Monterrey in Mexico. Similarly, Montavon and Kinser (1996) mention the use of Chapter 1 Migrant Education Funds to initiate a district's summer migrant education program.

- *Professional development opportunities can be used to build capacity.* Murry and Herrera (1996) discuss an increase in district funding for teacher participation in the state university's program for ESL endorsement. This reference, while older than the others, is consistent with current concerns to achieve high-quality instruction for English language learner students by ensuring that all teachers understand effective practice in instructing English language learner students.
- *Funding to support English language learner students is motivated by the emphasis on assessment and accountability.* Wrigley (2000) points out that the increased emphasis on standards and high-stakes testing and related questions about fair treatment of English language learner students has resulted in some rural districts gaining additional state and local funding.

*Voices from the interviews.* One district administrator referred to state funds made available to develop resources and provide professional development for teachers in districts with newly enrolling English language learner students. In general, however, ad-

ministrators noted the difficulty of funding services. Administrators also noted that moving from consultant-based or part-time ESL specialist services to a full-time designated position was an important transition and a much anticipated step forward in support for their programs. One program coordinator, who had begun serving the English language learner

students on a consultant basis and later in a designated full-time position, noted that as the numbers of students continued to grow, she was able to obtain district funding for an additional position by demonstrating that it was not possible to visit in one day the number of schools she was expected to visit given the increased enrollments of English language learner students.

*Data and data management.* School and district staff will be able to make better decisions about English language learner student instruction and progress if key background information is collected and if data management and reporting systems make these data available to district and school staff. Ideally, the data systems would include information on how long a student has been in the district and in schools within the United States and how much prior education the student has received outside the United States. NCLB and state regulations on NCLB implementation require reporting on English language learner students as a separate subgroup once the English language learner population reaches a specified level.

*Examples from the literature.* Data collection systems are important for keeping both demographic data and accountability data on English language learner students. Hill and Flynn (2004) describe a district's development of a data collection system to monitor the progress of each student. Both demographic data (school, grade level, place of birth, native language, time in United States) and outcome data (pre- and post-test scores on the Woodcock-Muñoz Language Survey, projected and actual gains in English proficiency, scores on district and statewide achievement tests) were collected and used for monitoring the progress of each student identified by the home language survey as speaking a language other than English at home. This data management system was found to be an extremely useful tool for accountability and decisionmaking on English language learner students.

**It is important that districts and schools establish consistent procedures and administer assessments to determine a student's eligibility for English language learner services**

*Voices from the interviews.* Two of the districts described efforts to maintain records on background and assessment data on their English language learner students and the importance of these for decisionmaking about students. One administrator referred to the heavy demands for data gathering placed on the schools and districts by NCLB requirements. She further noted, however, that one benefit of these demands was increased visibility for the program and greater likelihood that decision-makers would address program needs.

Some district administrators commented on the importance of data systems for other purposes, including preparing for later reporting requirements, supporting decisionmaking, evaluating student progress, and documenting district and school needs for staff and other support when requesting funding.

### Assessment

*Identification for English language learner services.* It is important that districts and schools establish consistent procedures and administer assessments to determine a student's eligibility for English language learner services and to support placement decisions.

#### *Examples from the literature*

- *Establish consistent means of identifying students eligible for English language learner services.* Hill and Flynn (2004) describe instruments and practices for identification and ongoing evaluation of student eligibility for English language learner services. For example, outcomes of the Woodcock-Muñoz Language Survey were used to determine which students were recommended for placement in the English language learner program. These assessment outcomes were also used to monitor student progress and to determine when students were eligible for exit from the program. After

students transitioned to a mainstream program, their progress was monitored for one year. Similarly, Montavon and Kinser (1996) describe the use of the Woodcock Language Proficiency Battery-Revised (1991) for student identification and placement in the rural district they observed.

- *Establish consistent and ongoing monitoring of appropriate placement and needs.* Montavon and Kinser (1996) describe monitoring procedures. To monitor English language learner students' academic progress, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (1986) was administered in the fall and the Riverside Achievement Test (Prueba de Realización, 1991) in Spanish in the spring. Alternative assessments for tracking progress were also administered during the summer Migrant Educational Program (journals tracked writing development and a math achievement test was administered at the end of the program).

*Voices from the interviews.* One administrator developed an assessment at intake for determining student proficiency in English through a brief interview. Another noted that assessment at intake was initially for oral proficiency only but that the district later began to include a literacy assessment to better assess student ability to participate in instruction and to more accurately guide student placement.

**Districts and schools will need to become familiar with legislative requirements for assessment of English language learner students' level of English proficiency**

#### *Assessment of progress in English language and in achievement of academic content standards.*

Districts and schools will need to become familiar with legislative requirements for assessment of English language learner students' level of English proficiency and regulations for implementation

of assessments through their state education agency federal programs office. Teachers will benefit from the use of assessment data to track the progress of English language learner students in developing proficiency in English and to inform instruction.

*Examples from the literature.* Chang (1990) emphasizes the importance of program evaluation to assess and document the impact of student participation in newcomer programs.

Montavon and Kinser (1996) describe the use of assessment to monitor the progress of students in the Transitional Bilingual Program, including use of assessments in both English and Spanish and the use of both standardized and alternative formative assessments (such as journals used to track writing development).

*Voices from the interviews.* Administrators noted that the NCLB requirements focused the attention of superintendents and other decisionmakers on English language learner program needs. Even where the numbers were too low to trigger reporting requirements under the NCLB Act, program administrators with small numbers of English language learner students were aware that they would need to report on English language learner subgroups in the future, as the population increased. Thus, NCLB requirements highlighted the importance of ensuring that English language learner students were making adequate progress so that the district would be prepared to demonstrate adequate yearly progress when reporting did become a requirement.

Respondents in at least two districts described questions asked by classroom teachers related to assessment issues. For example, teachers frequently asked questions about how to assign grades to students who are English language learners; they were unsure of how to

complete quarterly reports on students with little English proficiency.

### Outreach

*Outreach to students.* Practices and policies that reach out to English language learner students can help them to understand the culture of the school and classroom and feel comfortable and welcome in the learning environment.

*Examples from the literature.* It is important to consider the environment being provided for English language learner students. Understanding that the students may be fearful in their new environment, administrators and teachers should take advantage of opportunities to make students feel welcome and help them get to know English-speaking students (Mid-Continent Comprehensive Center, 2005).

*Voices from the interviews.* One administrator noted the importance of making students feel welcome and comfortable in their new environment, based on the staff's belief that the students cannot do their best academically if they are struggling socially and emotionally. At the same time this administrator and others noted that although at first—very early in their experience in working with English language learner students—the staff felt it was sufficient to give support and encouragement to the English language learner students, they came to recognize that it was equally important to set high expectations for performance from the start and not to be satisfied with the students becoming more comfortable and more proficient in English alone. In one program the staff decided to ensure that kindergarten and grade 1 students were given additional instructional support in meeting academic standards as a key to their success in later grades.

*Outreach to parents.* Families of English language learners often do not understand schooling

Practices and policies that reach out to English language learner students can help them to understand the culture of the school and classroom

practices (such as homework policies, field-trip procedures, parent-teacher meetings) and are uncomfortable coming into schools. Specific and regular efforts to reach out to parents can help them to understand such practices and to feel more comfortable visiting schools. For both schools and districts the first step is to identify local and other resources to provide interpretation and translation support for communication with parents and others in the English language learner community.

### *Examples from the literature*

- *Establish connections with students' homes.* In the majority of documents reviewed, establishing connections with students' homes was regarded as an integral part of an English language learner program. Thus, for example, in Brunn's (2000) study of a rural Mid-western school district the parents were involved in developing and implementing the English language learner program together with the students, teachers, and school and district administrators. While consensus building was difficult at times, Brunn stresses the importance of involving all stakeholders. The Mid-Continent Comprehensive Center (2005) notes the cultural differences in views about parent and school contacts.
- *Broaden opportunities for interacting with parents.* Wrigley (2000) emphasizes the need to cultivate links between home and school by going beyond translating documents into the families' native languages. She describes a school in rural Virginia whose principal greatly increased the participation of Hispanic parents through a series of parent meetings, conducted in Spanish, on the importance of parents' involvement in their children's education. Hamann (2003) describes what some called the ultimate home visit, as

teachers from one Georgia district traveled to the areas in Mexico that were the original home communities of students in the school. Hamann's discussion of the Georgia project also makes clear the role that local community and business members can play in developing infrastructure and resources to meet the needs of English language learner students and their families.

In the district studied by Hill and Flynn (2004) the focus was on developing staff capacity to improve communication with parents, identifying the needs of parents (through surveys in their native language), and making efforts to ensure that parents were able to actively participate in their children's education. Findings from a needs assessment conducted by an advisory council showed that parents could benefit from training in such areas as their rights and responsibilities under the NCLB Act, effective communication at parent-teacher conferences, English classes for adults, and services in the community.

Other recommendations for encouraging parents to participate include offering English classes for parents, holding regular parent meetings, and involving other members of the community who speak their language. Wainer (2004) provides examples of innovative strategies for engaging parents in the school, such as offering more scheduling flexibility for school meetings and providing interpreters, offering food and babysitting for parents for school

**Recommendations for encouraging parents to participate include offering English classes for parents, holding regular parent meetings, and involving other members of the community who speak their language**



gatherings, and providing language and family literacy classes.

- *Structure opportunities for communication with parents as part of the daily school environment.* Hill and Flynn (2004) recommend making an effort early on to ensure that the families' languages and cultures are represented in the school and that someone on staff is able to communicate with the families. They point out that paraprofessionals do not need to meet the NCLB "highly qualified" requirements if they are hired as translators or to work with parents. Wainer (2004) suggests offering opportunities for parents to communicate in the home language with the school (such as translation services available for registration, bilingual "office hours" each morning, and specific instruction in the students' language about the school system and classroom).

*Voices from the interviews.* While the literature emphasizes outreach to parents and community, some district administrators reported that outreach was the weakest part of their program and something they had difficulty doing successfully. The coordinators recognized the need for outreach to families but noted that they could not always do it or do it successfully. One district coordinator stated that this was an area in which more

work was needed. Districts often attempt to have translators available for meetings and to have documents translated (at least into Spanish and in some cases into other languages). One district reported on activities to involve parents (such as an international festival evening) and described how the school and district

learned to change their initial focus on the Hispanic population (the largest group) to one that more demonstrably included all language

and cultural groups in the district. Another administrator recalled that in the earliest days of the program, she visited every student's home and felt that it was a very important step toward building relationships between the parents and the school. As the number of English language learners increased, however, she was not able to continue these visits.

An administrator described changes over time in his district's outreach to parents, outlining a progression in the English language learner program from meetings held once or twice a year and intended to show parents the districts' concern to serve English language learners, to regular meetings held frequently and with more planned content. Next, the district began to offer other services to assist parents more broadly in their lives within the community—for example, language classes and other activities that extended beyond information related strictly to the students' participation in the school. Other administrators discussed outreach opportunities such as English classes for parents and additional information sessions (such as college planning information).

*Outreach to the community.* District outreach to the local community—to businesses and other community organizations—can be a source of helpful resources for the district, enrichment for the schools, and support for resolving various concerns.

*Examples from the literature.* Two examples from the literature suggest potential value in links with employers. One district worked with a local employer to alter employment practices in ways that reduced turnover in the workforce, thus reducing the high levels of mobility among English language learner students in the school. In another case a local businessman was the driving force behind a comprehensive project to support English language learner instruction in the district (Hamann, 2003).

**Some district administrators reported that outreach was the weakest part of their program and something they had difficulty doing successfully**



*Voices from the interviews.* Outreach to the broader community was not frequently mentioned by the interview participants, although two examples did suggest the value of developing relationships within the community. One administrator mentioned talking with a prominent restaurant owner whose employees often had children who were enrolled in the schools, to gain the owner's perspective on services for the students. Another mentioned that earlier in the district's history, when churches were sponsoring refugee families, a connection was made with the churches and social service agencies to request that they inform the school in advance about the education needs of the new families so that the schools could better prepare for the new students.

*Outreach to social services.* Outreach to social services can assist district and school staff in addressing student needs for housing and other support. Outreach might also be expanded to other organizations and resources in the area, for example, links to healthcare providers to facilitate access to services for students and their families and to assist district staff in meeting student health needs.

*Examples from the literature.* Gathering information on local services can be valuable. One guide notes that community support for English language learner students includes assisting their families in becoming familiar with resources and services in the local community (health services, migrant services, translator services, shopping and basic living tips) (Mid-Continent Comprehensive Center, 2005).

*Voices from the interviews.* Two administrators discussed coordinating with social services very early on, as the first English language learner students arrived. They recognized the need for healthcare and other forms of support to ensure that students would arrive at school ready to learn. Many English

language learner families were in need of food and clothing, healthcare, and other forms of assistance.

*Outreach to other districts.* District administrators can find support and suggestions through networks of districts that share similar experiences, whether through formal district consortia or informal networking.

*Examples from the literature.* Other districts can be used as resources. Networking with other districts can be done at the school level. A district administrator can encourage school staff to visit neighboring districts that are already working with English language learner students to observe and talk with teachers about assessment, methods and strategies, communicating with parents, and other issues (Mid-Continent Comprehensive Center, 2005).

*Voices from the interviews.* One district administrator considered outreach to other districts a key source of support and a resource for learning about how to improve services for English language learner students. The administrator attended local professional conferences and gained perspective on the cultural backgrounds of the students, materials, and resources. Through contacts made, the administrator began to network with administrators in other districts facing similar issues. Particularly helpful was joining a consortium with districts more experienced in working with English language learner students and with similar perspectives on services and approaches. The administrator noted that networking with other districts is more valuable and can continue more easily on an ongoing basis when the districts share a common vision or philosophy for services for students.

**Outreach to social services can assist district and school staff in addressing student needs for housing and other support**

## Perspectives of districts serving emerging English language learner communities

It takes time for any district with an emerging English language learner community to develop the capacity and funding sources needed to provide the full infrastructure to support the English language learner students in its population. Thus, districts will find it useful to define priorities as they begin to respond to English language learner student enrollments. In the interviews the administrators in districts with emerging English language learner communities described efforts that focused on personnel components (leadership, professional development, staffing) and on outreach (to parents). While there is no clear research base to define these priorities, personnel, outreach, and instructional services have been highlighted in the literature on emerging English language learner communities (Hill and Flynn, 2004; Wainer, 2004; Chang, 1990). Also, August and Hakuta (1997) identify professional development for teachers and a supportive environment as components of effective schooling for English language learner students.

**Districts' practices and assumptions about infrastructure components changed as they gained more experience working with English language learner students**

In the interviews with administrators all three personnel components appeared to be given priority: having a designated person assume leadership responsibility for English language learner students and for gathering and sharing information about the students and their needs; identifying qualified staff and

providing support for “growing” qualified staff within the district; and ensuring that teachers are given support and training in strategies to work effectively with English language learner students. For outreach the focus has been on informing parents about schooling and their role and on keeping parents informed about student progress and school activities. For some administrators outreach has also included outreach to other districts through networking to gain and share information.

Districts described how their practices and assumptions about infrastructure components changed as they gained more experience working with English language learner students. For example, in professional development, districts typically focused initially on ESL resource teachers and other teachers of English language learner students. Later, professional development for all teachers in the district became an important objective.

Administrators also highlighted other infrastructure components. Administrative components were discussed as important, including establishing clear and consistent procedures for registration and placement and using data to better understand student needs and document program needs. Instructional services for English language learner students focused on providing support through instruction with resource and ESL teachers and through assistance to teachers working with English language learner students in mainstream settings (for example, to develop instructional strategies for working effectively with English language learner students, such as in Echevarria et al., 2004; Hill and Flynn, 2006).

## WHAT HAVE DISTRICTS LEARNED ABOUT SERVING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER STUDENTS?

There has been limited information directed toward districts with emerging English language learner communities. The findings reported here are drawn from the limited literature that focuses on these districts and on responses from a small sample of districts and schools. A broad survey of districts could ensure a more representative set of districts in different phases of receiving English language learners under different circumstances.

However, the findings in both the literature and the conversations with district and school administrators outline how a number of districts have begun to build capacity to serve English language

learners as their English language learner populations have grown from a few students to many. This section highlights the stages in building capacity to serve English language learner students derived from the literature review and interviews and then summarizes these using a framework for building capacity to serve English language learners.

### Stages in building capacity for effective English language learner services

The findings from the literature and the interviews suggest common transitions among districts responding to English language learner enrollments and learning to meet the needs of their English language learner students. These might be viewed as simply a normal progression in program expansion. However, the comments offered by administrators suggest that these transitions might be characterized as stages in understanding the needs of English language learner students and their families that are then reflected in further articulation of the district's program to support student learning.

Four stages can be described: ad hoc response, consistent services, program development, and expanded perspectives. Each is based on what appears to be qualitatively different viewpoints about what constitutes services for English language learner students and how the services are related to the services provided for all students.<sup>6</sup>

*Ad hoc response.* As the first English language learner students enroll, both the district and school make the best use of existing resources to obtain information about student needs and to provide services. Without any established resources or infrastructure in place, practices may vary from location to location within a district. Staff may be unsure about what to do. Using student “buddy” systems, assigning students to classrooms of interested teachers, and designating a portion of a foreign language teacher's time to working with English language learner students were some of the strategies used.

*Consistent services.* As the number of English language learner students enrolling in the district or school rises, awareness builds that this student population is a lasting part of the school's population. The staff recognizes the need to formalize services for these students, and steps are taken to develop consistent procedures and services. One interviewee described such a transition when her district noted that increasing numbers of English language learner students were enrolling in the schools and then stayed in the region—rather than enrolling and then leaving shortly thereafter, as before. As the district and school staff observed the increase, they recognized the need to have a plan in place for serving English language learner students, whom they had begun to acknowledge as truly part of the district's student population.

In other cases district administrators were prompted to a new awareness of the need for a coherent plan for English language learner students by evidence that the ad hoc practices were no longer working. The administrators found that as the number of English language learner students grew, some of the ad hoc steps that were seen as successful strategies with smaller enrollments of students began to fail. In one district where English language learner students were assigned to the classroom teacher who was eager to include them in her class, the solution worked well while there were only a few students. But as the number of English language learners in the class grew to six, the teacher became less and less comfortable with the arrangement. It had become too much of a challenge, and it was clear that a new plan was needed. Consistent services include professional development, resources for specialist teachers, meetings with parents, and standard registration procedures that take English language learner student identification into account.

*Program development.* Once consistent services are in place for English language learner students, the staff begins to consider coordination and

**There are four stages in building capacity to serve English language learner students**

program-level needs. Along with an increased focus on hiring staff with specialized expertise, this is a point where districts begin to emphasize regular staff development, outreach, curriculum, materials to fit that curriculum across grade levels, and greater coordination across school sites.

*Expanded perspectives.* After a program is in place, districts begin to consider integration of services for English language learner students with the overall program for K–12 students. Districts re-

ported increased efforts to ensure that services for English language learner students were part of a whole-district and whole-school effort, developing out of a perspective that meeting the needs of English language learner students is one part of how districts and schools meet the differentiated needs of all students. One administrator characterized the change

in perspective in her district as a shift from a focus on only the ESL teachers and teachers with English language learner students in their classes to a recognition that the district needed to focus on the role of all teachers and all staff who work and interact with English language learner students. At the time of the interview the district was planning its first professional development workshop on English language learner issues for mainstream teachers. Before this a similar workshop had been provided for teachers of English language learner students only.

*How the concept of stages may be useful to other districts.* The four stages in serving English language learners offer a way of understanding capacity building in districts with emerging English language learner communities. While these are abstracted from a limited base of findings, the concept of a series of stages may be useful to other districts with emerging English language learner communities in at least two ways.<sup>7</sup>

First, specific examples from districts at similar stages and similar levels of infrastructure may be

helpful for districts. Districts, even those in the ad hoc stage of responses, may benefit from examples of steps taken by other districts at a similar point in their development of an infrastructure of services for English language learner students. For example, suggestions of how to make the most of existing local resources to provide services immediately will be useful to a district just beginning to enroll English language learner students. This is the type of guidance specific to the needs and contexts of districts with small populations and limited resources that the interview respondents indicated was sorely lacking.

Second, description of stages may facilitate district planning for English language learner services. Districts that are just beginning to enroll English language learner students may be helped by identifying their initial ad hoc responses and may be prompted to move more quickly toward a broad, more programmatic and integrated approach to services. Similarly, before any English language learner students have enrolled in a district, a district can build knowledge of how a program might be put into place and develop plans to do so. This might minimize reliance on ad hoc services and the difficulties and frustration that these may entail for staff, students, and families. Also, awareness of the stages can help the district leadership maintain a forward-looking perspective and thus anticipate needs and plan for further development of infrastructure components to improve the program.

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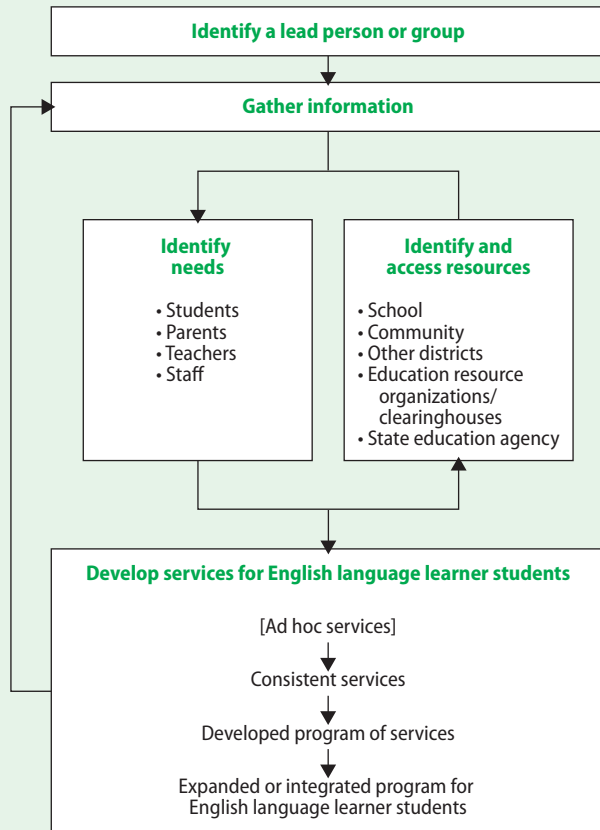
#### A framework for building capacity to serve English language learner students

A framework for building capacity to serve English language learner students can be outlined based on the findings of the literature review and interviews (figure 5). In this framework capacity building begins with a leadership structure for decisionmaking. Leadership can be provided by an individual or a group. Administrators reported that enrollment of the first group of English language learner students triggered this step, but ideally a leadership structure would be defined

**Administrators found that as the number of English language learner students grew, the ad hoc steps that were successful with smaller enrollments of students began to fail**

FIGURE 5

**A framework for building capacity to serve emerging English language learner communities**



Source: Authors' compilation from the literature and interviews described in the text and appendix A.

well before that and would prompt efforts to accumulate information and identify means of access to resources.

This would be an important step for districts in the Appalachia Region, where dispersal of English language learner students to new areas is expected to continue. Often, educators in rural areas are unaware of the growing immigrant community in their area and do not develop a plan for English language learner students until the numbers grow so large that they cannot be ignored. By that point, however, teachers and students have already experienced considerable frustration because of the lack of instructional and moral support (New York University, Metro Center for Urban Education,

2001). By planning before the first English language learner student has enrolled, a district will be able to move quickly through, or even avoid, a period of ad hoc services.

The initial task of the leadership is to gather information about requirements for serving English language learner students. That includes learning about the students—their backgrounds, languages and cultures, and education needs—and also understanding the needs of teachers, administrators, and staff in the district for serving English language learner students.

A second responsibility is to identify what resources will be available and how to access them. For districts far from resource centers and with limited specialized expertise on which to draw, this will include identifying and maximizing the use of local resources (Bérubé, 2000, provides some examples of strategies). The process may involve a range of strategies for identifying resources locally, including looking at resources available among parents, the business community, and local community organizations, or building the needed expertise within current staff and restructuring positions to take advantage of existing staff skills, such as translation. Other strategies may involve networking with more experienced districts to learn what sources they have identified (for example, use of online translation services where local capacity is lacking) and working with sources of technical assistance, such as the state education agency Title III office, the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center, and U.S. Department of Education resources (see appendix C for links to resource centers).

With needs and resources identified, a plan can be constructed for providing services to English language learner students. Priorities would be identifying specific staff and determining how to revise staff roles to assist English language learner students, providing professional development for teachers working with English language learner students, and determining the best methods to reach parents. To the extent possible, a district

**Having information on districts with various levels of representation of English language learner students and on key links to resources can assist districts in accessing sources of expertise and communicating with other districts facing similar capacity-building challenges**

should prepare capacity for serving English language learner students with information about the linguistic and cultural groups likely to locate there. New York University, Metro Center for Urban Education (2001) provides a concise, useful overview of some steps that districts in rural areas with emerging English language learner communities can take.

Capacity building is an iterative process. District administrators described their reexamination of

the services provided to English language learner students and of the needs of students, families, and instructional staff. They reviewed their success in addressing those needs and in reaching achievement and performance goals. However, a proactive stance may change the pattern of capacity building outlined in figure 5, which is based on the sequence of capacity-building stages observed in the findings for districts with emerging English language learner communities. If a district

establishes the goal of an integrated program for English language learner students early on, the sequence of stages likely will not apply and the steps taken could be very different. For example, professional development might be addressed from the very beginning for all teachers, not only for those working directly with English language learner students.

The findings reported here offer insight into the experience of districts, examples of steps taken, and perspectives on building capacity to serve English language learner students. As such, the findings may be useful to the many districts that are newly enrolling English language learner students. Having information on districts with various levels of representation of English language learner students and on key links to resources (see appendixes B and C) can assist districts in accessing sources of expertise and communicating with other districts facing similar capacity-building challenges. Further research on district responses to emerging English language learner communities could offer additional guidance on priorities in building capacity to serve English language learner students.