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Educational Outcomes of English Language Learners in Massachusetts: A Focus on Latino/a Students

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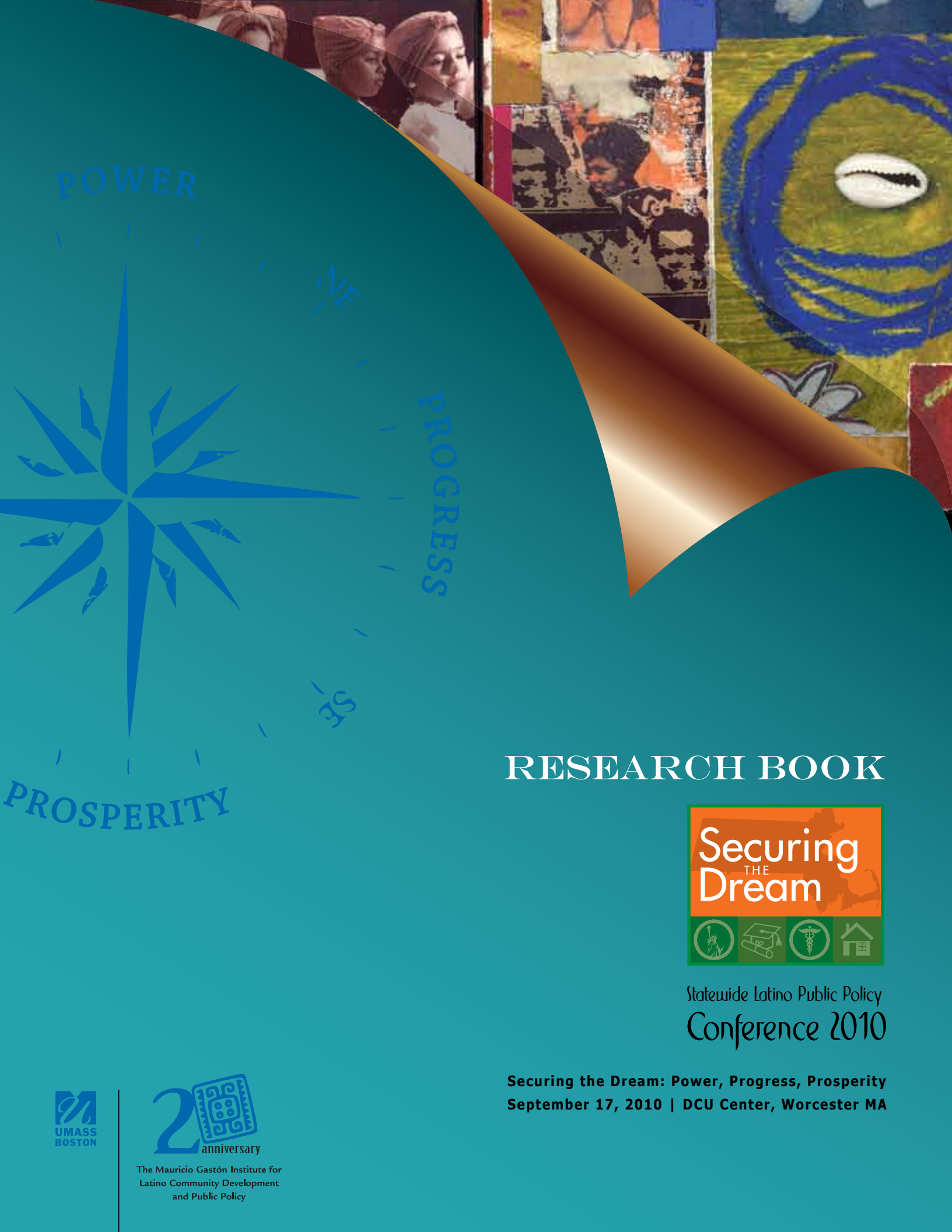


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Recommended Citation

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Statewide Latino Public Policy
Conference 2010

Securing the Dream: Power, Progress, Prosperity
September 17, 2010 | DCU Center, Worcester MA



The Mauricio Gastón Institute for
Latino Community Development
and Public Policy



Statewide Latino Public Policy
Conference 2010

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CHAPTER 3

Educational Outcomes of English Language Learners in Massachusetts: A Focus on Latino/a Students

By Faye Karp and Miren Uriarte, PhD

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This research was made possible through a generous grant
from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation.

Abstract

This report analyzes trends in enrollment and outcomes for English Language Learner students (ELLs), a growing population in Massachusetts, in the post-Question 2 policy environment. Where possible, the report presents data on Latino students of Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

Few LEP students, and few of the native Spanish speakers among them, reach the highest level of English language proficiency as measured by the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA). Though some improvements have been seen in terms of Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) performance and graduation rates, the rates remain low and the persistence of large gaps between LEPs and their English Proficient (EP) peers is troubling.

The report concludes with state- and district-level policy recommendations.

Introduction

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) defines both English Language Learners (ELLs) and students of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) as students “who are native speakers of languages other than English and who are not able to perform school work in English” (MDOE, 2004).¹ While total student enrollment in Massachusetts has been decreasing, the enrollment of LEP students has been increasing.

The education of all LEPs in Massachusetts has been subject to the guidelines of Chapter 386 of the Acts of 2002 since the fall of 2003. Chapter 386, also known as Question 2 after the 2002 “English only” ballot question which required this law to be enacted, reversed the bilingual education mandate that had been law in Massachusetts since 1971. In contrast, Chapter 386 mandates that ELLs be educated solely in English, using Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) as a method of instruction, unless the student’s parent requests an alternative program option. The law specifies that students’ native language may be used only when necessary and even then on a minimal basis. Chapter 386 intended for most English Language Learners to be placed in SEI classrooms for no more than one year before transitioning to mainstream classrooms, with the assumption that English can be learned “rapidly and effectively” along with other academic subject matter.²

Though Chapter 386 represented a major change in the way our Commonwealth’s ELLs are being taught, the state has not systematically determined the impact of this change on the educational outcomes of ELLs. Others who have begun to analyze the impact of this policy change have identified the following areas of concern: under-enrollment of LEPs (ELL Sub-Committee, 2009; Tung et al., 2009); differences in implementation and outcomes across districts (DeJong, Gort, & Cobb, 2005; ELL Sub-Committee, 2009; Owens, 2010; Rennie Center, 2007; Uriarte & Karp 2009); concentration in one type of program (Owens, 2010; Tung et al., 2009; Uriarte & Karp, 2009); over-enrollment in special education programs (SPED) (ELL Subcommittee, 2009; Tung et al., 2009; Uriarte & Karp, 2009); differential outcomes across language groups (Uriarte et al., 2009); increased annual dropout rates (ELL Sub-Committee, 2009; Owens, 2010; Tung et al., 2009; Uriarte et al., 2009; Uriarte & Karp, 2009); only slight improvement in Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) outcomes (Owens, 2010; Tung et al., 2009; Uriarte & Karp, 2009); and the persistence of achievement gaps between LEPs and their English Proficient (EP) peers (ELL Sub-Committee, 2009; Owens, 2010; Tung et al., 2009; Uriarte & Karp, 2009).

This report, prepared for the 2010 Statewide Latino Public Policy Conference, examines ELLs in the aftermath of Question 2, with special attention to Latino students, in terms of:

1. The trends in enrollment of students of Limited English Proficiency in Massachusetts and selected districts.
2. The progress of students of Limited English Proficiency in Massachusetts in learning English.
3. The trends in academic outcomes of students of Limited English Proficiency in Massachusetts and selected districts. Graduation rates, dropout rates, and academic achievement (as measured by MCAS) are presented.

The report concludes with state- and district-level policy recommendations.

We present publicly available data from ESE supplemented by data reported in other studies. Because publicly available ESE data on LEPs are largely not disaggregated by race/ethnicity or native language, we are limited in our ability to present outcomes data for Latino LEPs. Where Latino-only statistics are not available, we present data for the total LEP population in Massachusetts and in selected districts which enroll both a high proportion of LEPs and of Latino LEPs.

The Enrollment of English Language Learners in Massachusetts

Before examining the trends in enrollment patterns and educational outcomes among ELLs, it is important to understand their place within the public school system. Figure 1 displays student enrollment disaggregated by native language and language proficiency. Out of the 958,910 students enrolled in Massachusetts schools in AY2010,³ 807,737 (84.4%) are native English speakers (NES) and 149,316 (15.6%) are native speakers of other languages (NSOL), i.e., those whose first language is not English.

The majority of NSOLs in Massachusetts schools (60.4%) are proficient in English and capable of doing schoolwork in English. The remainder are students of Limited English Proficiency (LEPs), i.e., those who are native speakers of other languages and are not able to conduct regular classroom work in English. In AY2010, 39.6% of all native speakers of other languages (or 6.2% of all students in Massachusetts) fell into this category.

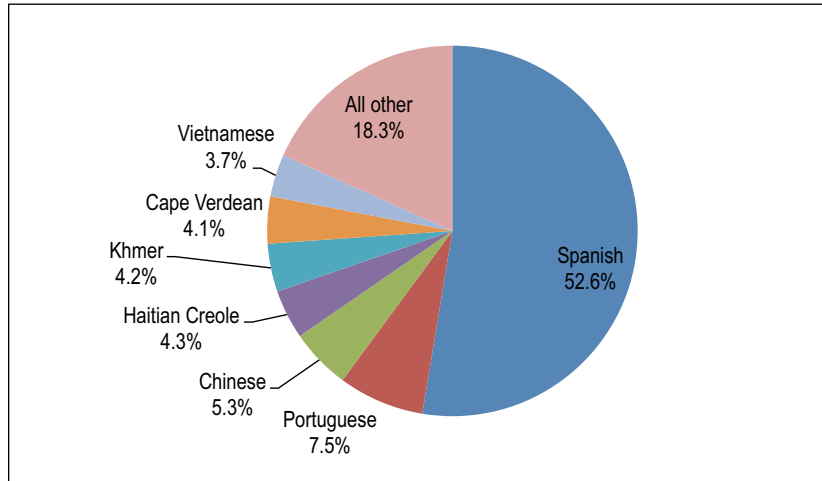
Figure 1. School Populations Defined by Language. MA, AY2010

Total	Total MA Enrollment 957,053		
Native Language	NES 807,737	NSOL 149,316	
Language Proficiency	EP 807,737	EP 90,158	LEP 59,158
Definitions: NES: Native English Speakers; NSOL: Native Speakers of Other Languages (also referred to as First Language is not English or FLNE); EP: Proficient in English; and LEP: of Limited English Proficiency.			
Source: ESE, 2010b			

Over half of all LEP students are native Spanish speakers.

Among LEPs in Massachusetts are speakers of many of the world's languages (Figure 2). In AY2009, the five largest language groups in Massachusetts were: 1) Spanish, 2) Portuguese, 3) Chinese (several dialects), 4) Haitian Creole, and 5) Khmer. Native Spanish speakers represent the largest proportion: 52.6% (30,693) of all LEPs in the Commonwealth. Among Latino⁴ students in Massachusetts, approximately 22.4% are of Limited English Proficiency.⁵ Latino LEP students may be foreign-born or native-born students. The foreign-born students come from a variety of countries of origin, have spent varying amounts of time in the U.S. and in Massachusetts schools, and bring different levels of literacy and education with them when they enter Massachusetts schools.

Figure 2: Percentage of Enrolled LEP Students by First Language. MA, AY2009

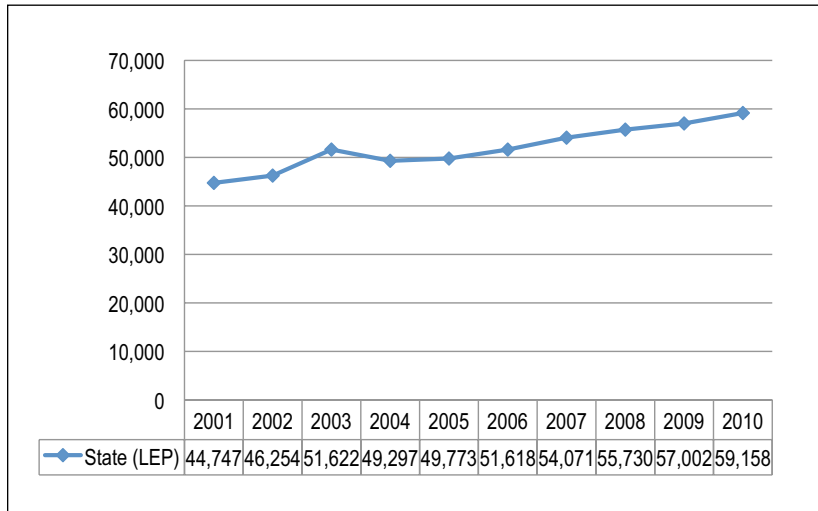


Source: ESE, 2009e

There is a growing enrollment of students of Limited English Proficiency statewide.

Between AY2001 and AY2010, LEP enrollments in Massachusetts increased by 32.2%. Enrollments have increased steadily each year for the past decade, with the exception of a decrease in enrollments in AY2004, the school year in which Chapter 386 was implemented. This decrease was heavily influenced by the sharp decrease in LEP enrollments in AY2004 in Boston, the district enrolling the largest number of ELLs in the state (Tung et al., 2009). In AY2010, 6.2% of all students in Massachusetts were of Limited English Proficiency.

Figure 3. Enrollment of Students of Limited English Proficiency. MA, AY2001–AY2010



Source: ESE, 2010b

The districts with the ten highest enrollments and the ten highest proportions of students of Limited English Proficiency in their enrollments for AY2010 are listed in Table 1. These twelve districts enroll two-thirds (67.1%) of the state’s LEP students in their schools. Lowell, Worcester, and Lynn, where at least one in four students is of Limited English Proficiency, have the largest proportions of ELLs in the state. Boston has the largest number of these students (11,271), enrolling 19.1% of the state’s LEP students in its schools.

Table 1. Districts with High LEP Enrollments and High LEP Proportions. MA, AY2010

Number Enrolled		Proportion of District Enrollment	
	State	State	6.2%
	59,158		
Boston	11,271	Lowell	32.4%
Worcester	6,388	Worcester	26.6%
Lowell	4,321	Lynn	25.9%
Lynn	3,465	Holyoke	23.3%
Springfield	3,288	Lawrence	23.1%
Lawrence	2,835	Boston	20.4%
Brockton	2,737	Brockton	17.7%
Holyoke	1,377	Chelsea	16.4%
Framingham	1,271	Somerville	16.0%
Quincy	1,044	Framingham	15.6%

Note: The table presents the 10 districts with the highest number of LEP enrollments (left side) and the 10 districts where enrollments contain the highest proportion of LEPs (right side).
Source: ESE, 2010b

These districts are strikingly similar in several ways. First, most are large, urban districts whose student populations are largely low-income and whose LEP populations are even more so (Owens, 2010, p. 17). Second, of the 35 schools identified in March 2010 by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as Level 4 turnaround schools, 33 are located in the districts displayed in Table 1.⁶ Finally, of the ten high-density LEP districts, seven are districts where the majority (over 50%) of LEPs are Latino/a, ranging from 59.8% in Worcester to 98.4% in Holyoke.⁷

Table 2: High-Density LEP Districts with Large Proportions of Latino LEPs. MA, AY2009

	Proportion of LEPs	Proportion of LEPs who are Latino
State	6.2%	56.1%
Holyoke	23.3%	98.4%
Lawrence	23.1%	96.8%
Chelsea	16.4%	82.9%
Lynn	25.9%	76.1%
Somerville	16.0%	70.3%
Boston	20.4%	60.0%
Worcester	26.6%	59.8%

Source: Owens, 2010, p. 20.

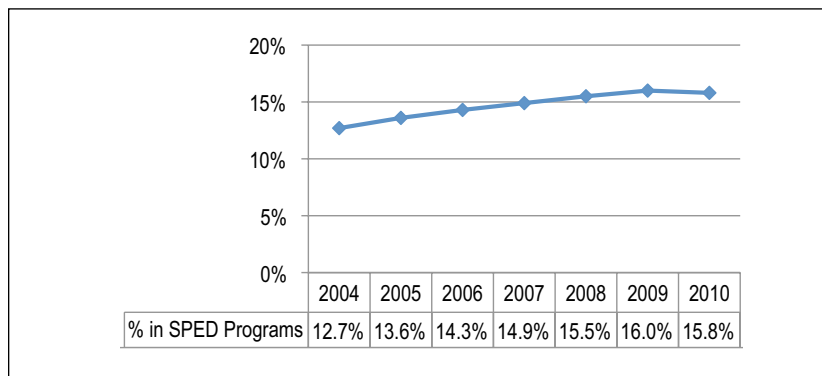
For the remainder of this report, we will present data on Latino LEPs, or when not possible, all LEPs enrolled in these seven districts, i.e., the districts with high proportions of LEPs and with a majority of their LEPs being Latino. These districts are listed in Table 2.

Key Findings

1. The enrollment of LEPs in special education (SPED) has increased.

Between AY2004,⁸ the first year of implementation of Question 2, and AY2010, the SPED enrollment rate among LEPs increased from 12.7% to 15.8%.⁹ This increase underscores potential problems in the identification and assessment of LEP students.

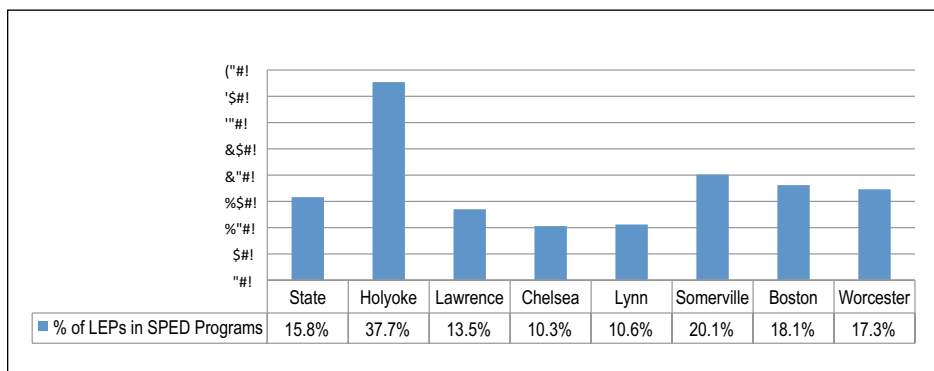
Figure 4. Proportion of LEPs Assigned to SPED Programs. MA, AY2004–AY2010



Source: ESE, 2010c

In AY2010, five of these high-density districts had a proportion of LEPs in SPED which surpassed the state average (Figure 5). In Holyoke, for example, 37.7% of LEPs were enrolled in a SPED program.¹⁰ Between AY2004 and AY2010, all but one of the high-density districts (Lynn) experienced increases in the proportion of LEPs assigned to SPED programs.

Figure 5. Proportion of LEPs Assigned to SPED programs. MA and Selected Districts, AY2010



Source: ESE, 2010c

2. Most LEP students are enrolled in Sheltered English Immersion programs.

In AY2009, 86.1% of LEPs in Massachusetts were enrolled in a program for English Language Learners.¹¹ The remaining 13.9% may be LEP students whose parents have requested placement in general education programs or students transitioning out of ELL programs. One salient exception appears to be taking place in Boston, where only 57.9% of LEPs were enrolled in ELL programs (Table 3). A 2009 report by the Boston Public Schools points to the lack of available SEI slots in schools and to misinformation provided to parents as the main causes of the high enrollments of ELLs in general education programs in Boston (BPS, 2009, p. 3). This anomaly has prompted the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights to review the education provided to ELLs in Boston, which is ongoing at the time of the writing of this report (Vaznis, 2009, 2010).

Statewide, of the students enrolled in ELL programs, the vast majority (94.2%) were enrolled in SEI programs, the default program under Chapter 386 (Table 3). Though SEI is the favored program under the law, if parents exercise their right to waive this placement, districts are responsible for providing alternative programs. In general, the districts examined here do not demonstrate much variety in their ELL programs. In Chelsea, Holyoke, and Lawrence all LEP students are enrolled in SEI; in Lynn and Worcester over 90% attend these programs. Somerville offers the most variety, with 76.7% of their students in SEI. Boston also offers dual language and literacy programs for English Language Learners.

Table 3. Enrollment in Programs for English Language Learners. LEPS. MA and Selected Districts, AY2009

	Total LEP	Percent enrolled in Programs for ELLs	LEPs in Program by Program Type		
			SEI	Other/TBE	2-Way
State	57,002	86.1%	94.2%	3.3%	2.4%
Holyoke	1,460	100%	100%	0%	0%
Lawrence	2,791	85.0%	100%	0%	0%
Chelsea	951	100%	100%	0%	0%
Lynn	3,419	87.1%	99.1%	0.9%	0.0%
Somerville	821	99.3%	76.7%	15.1%	8.2%
Boston	10,579	57.9%	88.1%	6.3%	5.5%
Worcester	5,621	95.7%	93.5%	6.3%	0.3%

Source: ESE, 2009a, pp. 28-36.

3. Only about 20% of LEPs, and an even smaller percentage of Latino LEPs, attain English language proficiency.

Massachusetts tests the proficiency in English of all LEP students using the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA). As of 2009, the MEPA test delineates five categories of English proficiency; MEPA Level 1 indicates that a student has not yet developed simple written and spoken communication in English, and MEPA Level 5 indicates that a student has achieved effective communication in English with few errors (ESE, 2009e, pp. 20–24).

At the state level, only about 20% of LEPs attained MEPA Level 5, ranging from 13% to 23% depending on grade level. Among native Spanish speakers, a lower proportion – between 10% and 17% depending on grade level – reach MEPA Level 5 (Table 4).

Table 4. Language Proficiency Levels of MEPA Test-Takers. LEPS. MA, AY2009

Grade Span	Total MEPA Test-Takers	Percent Scoring at MEPA Levels:				
		1	2	3	4	5
All LEPs						
K–2	21,202	12%	17%	34%	23%	13%
3–4	11,072	4%	6%	21%	48%	20%
5–6	7,313	6%	8%	24%	40%	22%
7–8	5,921	8%	13%	32%	24%	23%
9–12	9,655	10%	13%	37%	20%	20%
LEP Native Spanish Speakers						
K–2	10,893	14%	19%	35%	22%	10%
3–4	5,990	5%	7%	24%	47%	16%
5–6	4,042	6%	9%	28%	40%	17%
7–8	3,276	9%	14%	35%	24%	17%
9–12	4,655	12%	15%	39%	18%	15%

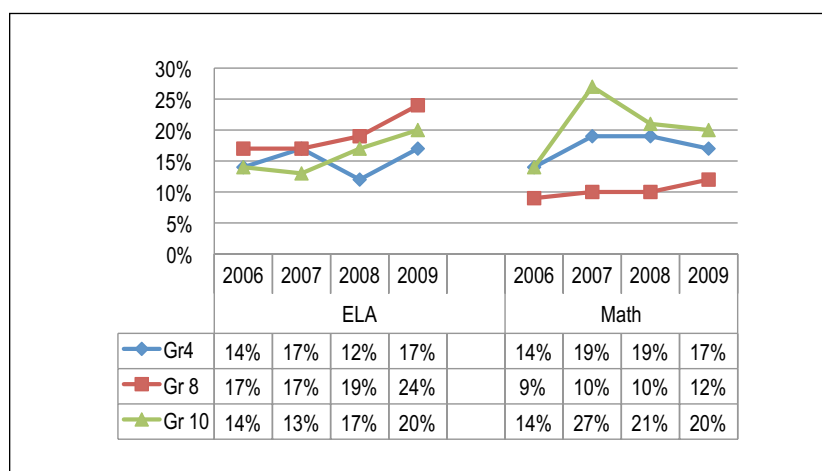
Source: ESE, 2009e, pp. 6, 12

4. Although there have been improvements in LEPs' MCAS Proficiency rates, the rates remain low and the gaps with the rates for English Proficient students are wide.

Massachusetts measures the achievement of students through MCAS, a series of standardized tests. ELLs are required to take MCAS tests in Reading in Grade 3, English Language Arts (ELA) in Grades 4, 7, and 10, Math in Grades 4, 8, and 10, and Science in Grades 5, 8, and 10). MCAS is scored using four levels of performance: Warning/Failing, Needs Improvement, Proficient, Advanced/Above Proficient. Beginning in 2008, a level of “proficiency” rather than “passing” is the standard for achievement and also is the requirement for graduation from high school.¹² In this section, therefore, we report the MCAS proficiency rates of ELLs at different grade levels.

Between AY2006 and AY2009,¹³ there were some improvements in both ELA and Math proficiency rates¹⁴ for LEP students (Figure 6). The biggest gains were made in 8th-grade ELA (up by 7 percentage points) and 10th-grade ELA and Math (both up by 6 percentage points).¹⁵ Yet, in general, proficiency rates are rather low. In AY2009, only 17% of 4th graders, 24% of 8th graders, and 20% of 10th graders attained proficiency on MCAS ELA; 17% of 4th graders, 12% of 8th graders, and 20% of 10th graders attained proficiency on MCAS Math. In addition, these improvements are tempered by the tendency for the gaps between LEP and EP students to widen during this time period.

Figure 6: ELA and Math MCAS Proficiency Rates for LEPs. MA, AY2006–2009



Source: ESE, 2009f

5. Aggregating the outcomes of ELLs at all levels of English proficiency obscures the true performance of ELLs.

Although the achievement of LEPs is most often reported in the aggregate, the fact that the universe of LEPs consists of students at many levels of English proficiency confounds the understanding of the achievement of LEP students. It also creates undue expectations because, while we can expect LEPs at the higher levels of proficiency (i.e., Levels 4 and 5 in MEPA) to perform similarly to EP students, the same cannot be expected of students at the lower levels of English proficiency. The aggregation of such disparate language abilities into one “LEP score” obscures the actual achievement of students whose outcomes should be appropriately measured by the MCAS. It also creates a “culture of failure” among students who are beginning to learn English and who should not be expected to perform well in the MCAS.

In 2009, the ELL Sub-Committee (pp. 15, 18–19, Appendix B) presented the MCAS scores of ELLs at different levels of proficiency in English, providing a somewhat different perspective on their performance. Their findings were the following:

- **Proficiency in MCAS ELA is possible primarily for students scoring at the highest MEPA performance level (Level 5), and not always for them.** Only 41.9% of 4th-grade test-takers, 60.9% of test-takers in 8th grade, and 54.3% of those in 10th grade attained proficiency in MCAS ELA in AY2009. Overall, their MCAS performance fell short of the proficiency rates of their EP counterparts statewide. Among the districts examined here, ELA proficiency rates (for those scoring at MEPA Level 5) ranged from a low of 0% for 10th graders in Lawrence to a high of 70.8% for 10th graders in Worcester (Table 5).

While LEPs who score at MEPA Level 5 are supposed to have achieved effective communication in English, this mastery has not necessarily translated to high MCAS ELA performance. This suggests that even at this high MEPA performance level, students do not have a sufficient command of “academic English” – the vocabulary, syntax, and paragraph organization that goes beyond conversational English – to succeed in school.

Table 5: MCAS ELA Proficiency Rates of EPs and LEPs Scoring at MEPA Level 5. MA and Selected Districts, AY2009

	Grade 4	Grade 8	Grade 10
State: EP	56.4%	72.8%	83.4%
State: LEP MEPA 5	41.9%	60.9%	54.3%
Holyoke	14.3%	50.0%	50.0%
Lawrence	38.5%	70.0%	0.0%
Lynn	32.3%	68.6%	61.8%
Boston	39.5%	50.0%	47.9%
Worcester	35.3%	56.9%	70.8%

Note: Data for Chelsea and Somerville are not shown as the data request did not originally include these districts.
Source: ELL Subcommittee, 2009, p. 15 and Appendix B.

- **Outcomes in MCAS Math for students at the highest level of proficiency in MEPA were very low.** In AY2009, MCAS Math proficiency rates for LEP students statewide scoring at MEPA level 5 were 39.9% among 4th graders, 29.0% among 8th graders, and 37.6% among 10th graders. Their MCAS Math performance also fell short of the proficiency rates of their EP counterparts statewide. Among the districts examined here, proficiency rates ranged from a low of 0% among 8th graders in Holyoke to a high of 67.6% (a rate above statewide EP and MEPA Level 5 proficiency rates) for 10th graders in Lynn (Table 6).

Table 6: MCAS Math Proficiency Rates of EPs and LEPs Scoring at MEPA Level 5. MA and Selected Districts, AY2009

	Grade 4	Grade 8	Grade 10
State: EP	50.2%	51.0%	58.0%
State: LEP MEPA 5	39.9%	29.0%	37.6%
Holyoke	14.3%	0%	50.0%
Lawrence	46.2%	40.0%	16.7%
Lynn	35.1%	14.3%	67.6%
Boston	34.1%	26.7%	62.9%
Worcester	45.7%	19.6%	43.5%

Note: Data for Chelsea and Somerville are not shown as the data request did not originally include these districts.
Source: ELL Subcommittee 2009, p. 18 and Appendix B.

6. Tenuous engagement has led to low graduation rates and high cohort dropout rates.

The ultimate success of a school system can be measured by its ability to graduate its students and prepare them for college or the workforce. The 4-year graduation rate tracks a particular cohort of students. Using the Class of 2006 as an example – taking the students who entered 9th grade in AY2003 – the 4-year graduation rate would be calculated by taking the number of those students who graduate in four years or less and dividing that by the total number of first-time-entering 9th graders in AY2003 (accounting for transfers in and out). Students who have not graduated within this 4-year time period – “non-graduates” – may still be enrolled in high school, may have earned a GED or received a certificate of attainment rather than a diploma, or may have dropped out. A cohort dropout rate, therefore, is calculated in a similar fashion. Simply put, the cohort dropout rate is the percentage of students in a cohort who dropped out of school at any time in Grades 9–12 and who did not return to high school during that four-year time period (ESE, 2007a).

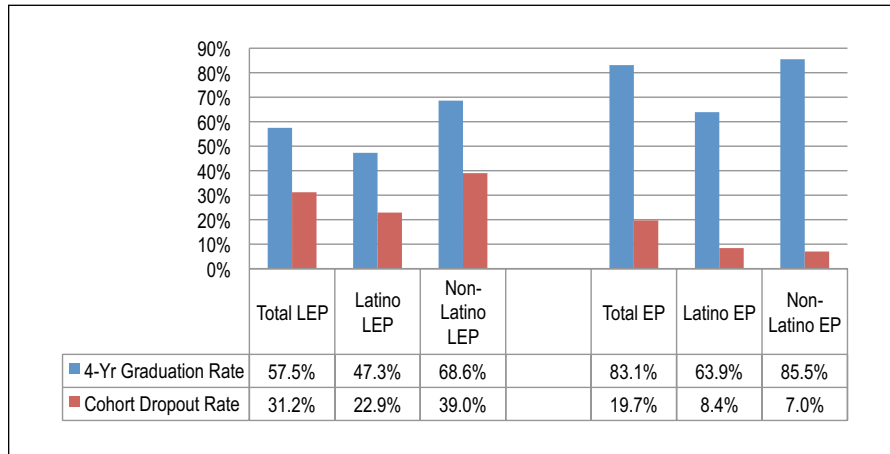
4-Year Graduation Rates.

The trend in the 4-year graduation rate among LEPs has been to increase slightly over time but remain very low. Comparing the Class of 2006 to the Class of 2009, the 4-year graduation rate increased from 54.5% to 57.5% (ESE, 2007b, 2010a). These rates were substantially lower than those of their EP counterparts, 83% of whom graduated in four years (Figure 7). Graduation rates among Latino LEPs, at 43.7% for the Class of 2009, were lower than the overall and non-Latino LEP rates and also lower than for English-proficient Latino students.

Cohort Dropout Rates

One of the reasons for the low graduation rates is the high cohort dropout rate for English Language Learners. For the Class of 2009, 31.2% of this cohort’s LEP students who entered the 9th grade in September 2005 had dropped out by the 12th grade. Among Latino LEPs the dropout rate was lower, at 22.9% of the cohort entering 9th grade in 2005.

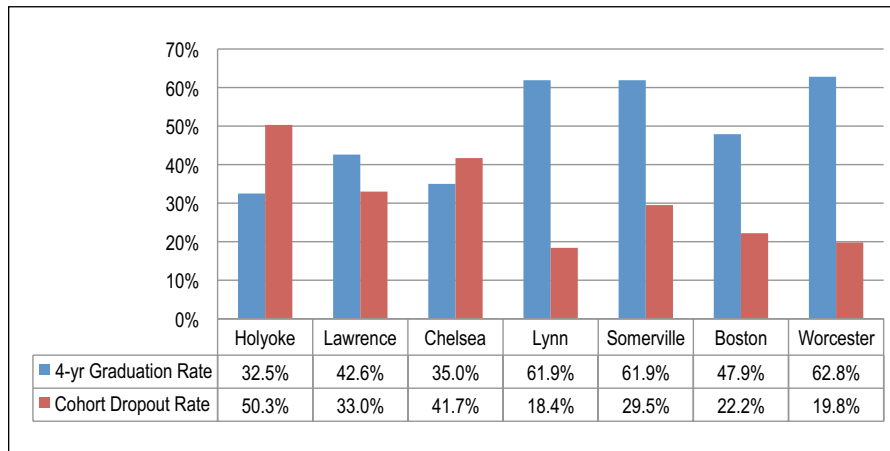
Figure 7: 4-Year Graduation Rates and Cohort Dropout Rates of LEP and EP Students. MA, Class of 2009



Source: ESE, 2010a

Graduation rates ranged from 32.5% (Holyoke) to 62.8% (Worcester) of LEPs. Cohort dropout rates were alarmingly high, ranging from 18.4% (Lynn) to 50.3% (Holyoke). In most cases, graduation rates have increased over time and cohort dropout rates have decreased (Figure 8).

Figure 8: 4-Year Graduation and Cohort Dropout Rates of LEP Students. Selected Districts, Class of 2009



Source: ESE, 2009d

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

This review of statewide enrollment and outcomes as well as district analyses presented here and in other studies suggest that the implementation of Chapter 386 of the Acts of 2002 has not met the expectations of improving the education of ELLs in Massachusetts and the Latinos among them, resulting in slight improvements in some academic outcomes (MCAS, graduation and cohort dropout rates) yet, overall, in increasing disparities in outcomes between LEPs and EPs. Low English proficiency levels, MCAS scores, and graduation rates (coupled with high dropout rates) suggest that SEI may not be the best program model for all LEP students, or that SEI teachers need better training and professional development. LEP

students do not appear to have a sufficient command of academic English to perform well academically or be engaged enough with the curriculum to graduate from high school.

These disparities signal the potential dangerous effect on our Commonwealth's economy down the road if a substantial portion of our youth is not educationally competitive today. Indeed, in January 2010, taking some steps to address the education of LEPs in Massachusetts, Governor Patrick launched a new wave of education reform, signing into law SB2247, "An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap." Among its changes, the law requires superintendents' turnaround plans of low-performing schools to attend to the academic underperformance of LEP students and to introduce alternative programs for LEPs within the confines of Chapter 386. The law also encourages improvement of professional development plans and establishment of LEP parent advisory councils in districts.¹⁶ This law is an important step in better addressing the needs of ELLs, but is not as comprehensive as the wide-reaching recommendations to improve the education of ELLs included in Rep. Jeffrey Sánchez's (15th Suffolk District) proposed reform bill, H486.

Accordingly, we conclude with state- and district-level recommendations which the deleterious data findings in this report serve to underscore. These recommendations echo those made recently by other experts in the field (Horwitz et al., 2009; Koelsch, 2009; Working Group on ELL Policy, 2010). They also dovetail with a number of the ELL Sub-Committee's (2009) recommendations. As this report goes to press, the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education is currently reviewing the ELL Sub-Committee's and other recommendations to narrow student proficiency gaps.

As 26% of students enrolled in the state's Level 4 turnaround schools are ELLs, turnaround strategies need to be particularly mindful of these recommendations. The efficacy of these turnaround plans and of the improvement of education for ELLs in other districts depends on a shift to a new set of values: seeing the value of bilingualism of all students to compete in a knowledge-based, global economy; one that valuing the rich cultural backgrounds that ELLs bring to our schools; and asserting the right of ELLs to appropriate opportunities for learning. These are values to which all districts in Massachusetts should subscribe (ELL Sub-Committee, 2009, pp. 23–24). With large proportions of Latino LEPs enrolled in these turnaround school districts, the Latino community must continue to have a strong voice in advocating for improvements in educating ELLs.

State-Level Recommendations

1. **ESE needs to provide better guidance to districts in interpreting Chapter 386 so that a wider range of student-centered programs can be developed.** Few LEP students, and few of the native Spanish speakers among them, are attaining the highest level of English language proficiency. ELL programs can no longer fall into the "one size fits all" trap, as depressed academic outcomes show that the current implementation of SEI has not improved the education of ELLs. Content instruction appears to be constrained by the requirement that it takes place only in English. Rigid implementation of this policy seems to be negatively affecting LEPs' MCAS and other academic performance and contributing to their disengagement from schooling. While state law favors the implementation of SEI programs, parents are allowed to make choices for their students, with districts required to develop these additional programs to meet ELL students' needs. ELL programs need to be flexible enough so that students' developmental and language proficiency needs are met. In addition, schools need to involve ELL students in the wealth of resources offered to other students: afterschool and extended day programs, AP classes and other college-bound coursework, MCAS preparation programs,

and dropout prevention programs. Again, these types of programs need to demonstrate cultural competence so they will be effective for Latino ELLs and ELLs of other language and ethnic backgrounds (ELL Sub-Committee, 2009, pp. 25–27).

2. **In order for strong program development to occur, the quality of instruction needs to be improved.** Depressed academic performance measures emphasize that teachers require additional and improved professional development opportunities. Indeed, the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education's 2009 report to the legislature noted the shortage of available and fully trained ESL teachers in Massachusetts: 1) while 303 school districts enroll at least one ELL student, ESL teachers are employed in only 129 districts; 2) a conservatively estimated 33–42% of elementary and secondary content teachers needing training in the four categories of SEI skills/knowledge had not received it; and 3) over 8,000 ELL students across the state did not receive any ESL instruction (ESE, 2009a, pp. 3–8). The ELL Sub-Committee (2009) made a number of recommendations to strengthen licensure requirements, in-service professional development, and pre-service teacher education. Among their recommendations were to: reinstate the bilingual ESL licensure requirements that existed prior to the implementation of Question 2; create a new bilingual/ESL SPED licensure; make the four categories of training competency-based, require the training for re-licensure in all areas of teacher certification (other than ESL or bilingual), and motivate teachers to complete it through Professional Development Points (PDPs) and salary incentives; create a statewide professional development program; and require all teacher preparation programs in Massachusetts to meet certain standards and requirements around ELL instruction in order to qualify for state accreditation (pp. 30–31). The state's Readiness Centers, though not currently funded, have the untapped ability to play a strong role in providing teachers with more effective ELL professional development. That the state's Race to the Top Application included provisions for improved professional development is encouraging, but the state needs to strengthen licensure requirements and pre-service education as well.
3. **In order for teachers to be able to most effectively instruct ELLs, data-driven decision making needs to happen at district and state levels.** The state needs to examine how ELLs are faring in Massachusetts schools. Their outcomes must not just be examined in the aggregate; they need to be disaggregated by MEPA score, by program type, by native language, and by other student/school characteristics. The state needs to ensure that districts have access to and know how to use data for program planning and evaluation of LEP student outcomes and progress over time. Parents also need access to and an understanding of these data in order for informed choice to occur. Access to data is not limited to demographic characteristics or academic engagement and outcomes trends. Successful instructional practices and other state-, district-, and school-level strategies for educating ELLs must be documented and disseminated widely (ELL Sub-Committee, 2009, pp. 31–33).
4. **Finally, all of these recommendations hinge upon improved professional development of all educational leaders – at school, district, and state levels.** In the context of the restrictions put in place by Question 2, it is paramount that leaders at all levels be competent in: understanding the laws and their requirements; understanding language acquisition and its implications for program development and instruction; using data for program planning and evaluating; evaluating ELL instruction; and understanding how to implement culturally competent policies and practices (ELL Sub-Committee, 2009, pp. 35). Again, if funded, the state's Readiness Centers could help district leaders in this area.

District- and School-Level Recommendations

While the recommendations above were targeted to ESE, a number of them hold true at the district, school, and even classroom levels. In addition, we recommend that educators aggressively address priority areas identified in this report:

1. **Dropout prevention. High dropout rates are clearly an alarming problem for Latino LEPs.** Dropout prevention needs to prioritize early intervention including the appropriate assessment and program placement of ELLs. Schools need to implement credit recovery programs that reach out to dropouts by providing them with alternatives to the traditional educational system. ELLs who enter MA schools as adolescents and those who arrive with low literacy in their native language require extra support and monitoring if they are to achieve academic success (Uriarte & Karp, 2009, p. 13).
2. **Academic achievement.** Perhaps the real key to dropout prevention is ensuring that ELLs are sufficiently taught academic content so they will succeed on MCAS and other measures of educational success, and, that ELLs who have attained high levels of English proficiency are adequately prepared to transition into general education classrooms. Mentoring, academic support, and wrap-around services should be present in schools, delivered by culturally competent staff, and organized in ways that are inclusive of ELLs (Uriarte & Karp, 2009, p. 13).

Taken together, these recommendations demand a level of accountability that has largely not been present in Massachusetts. It has been seven years since Chapter 386 took effect in Massachusetts; the state's failure to undertake a systematic review of this policy's effect on English Language Learners can no longer be accepted.

In order for English Language Learners, and the Latinos among them, to "secure the dream," these kinds of recommendations and an increased level of accountability need to be instituted. As the majority of English Language Learners in Massachusetts are Latino, Latinos stand to gain very much by improved ELL instruction and program development.

Notes

- ¹ Accordingly, we use these terms and their acronyms interchangeably in this report.
- ² See Chapter 386 of the Acts of 2002 available at <http://www.mass.gov/legis/laws/seslaw02/sl020386.htm>.
- ³ AY2010 refers to the academic year beginning in fall 2009 and ending in spring 2010. Throughout this report, all academic years are indicated in this manner.
- ⁴ In this report, we treat native “Spanish speakers” as “Latino” students.
- ⁵ AY2009 data. Calculated using ESE 2009c and ESE 2009e.
- ⁶ Indeed, 26% of students in these turnaround schools are LEPs. See ESE (2010d).
- ⁷ In Framingham, 45.9% of LEPs are Latino; in Lowell, 36.7%; and in Brockton, 17.9%
- ⁸ Data prior to this year (i.e., prior to the implementation of Chapter 386) are not publicly available from ESE.
- ⁹ These data are not publicly available disaggregated by race/ethnicity or native language.
- ¹⁰ Springfield, a district where 13.1% of students are of Limited English Proficiency and where 84.1% of LEPs are Latino/a, had 29.6% of its LEPs enrolled in SPED programs in AY2010.
- ¹¹ These data are not publicly available disaggregated by race/ethnicity or native language.
- ¹² Proficiency includes students scoring at the Advanced/Above Proficient and Proficient levels; passing includes students scoring at Advanced/Above Proficient, Proficient, and Needs Improvement levels.
- ¹³ MCAS data prior to AY2006 are not comparable.
- ¹⁴ Proficiency rates are defined as the percentage of students scoring at the Advanced and Proficient levels on MCAS. See ESE 2009b.
- ¹⁵ However, the gains in 10th grade may be an artificial effect. Large numbers of LEP students have dropped out, as discussed later in this report.
- ¹⁶ See Senate Bill No. 2247 available at www.mass.gov/legis/bills/senate/186/st02pdf/st02247.pdf.

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