

Increasing Opportunities for Academic Success of English Language Learners By Strengthening
Home and School Relations

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Abstract

The purpose of this capstone is to examine challenges for English language learners and face those challenges in attempt to mitigate through parent-school partnerships. Through a social-cultural lens, this capstone seeks to answer the question, how can schools increase the academic success of English Language Learners (ELLs) by strengthening home-school relations? The research suggests that when immediate needs are met and when academic support is provided at home and at school, students are more likely to experience academic success. Therefore the goal of the PD is to establish a committee that meets regularly with parents and students to strengthen relationships between families of ELLs and the school. The aim is to inform parents of academic opportunities including advanced coursework, and assist with basic needs of families to allow academic focus to occur. The expected outcome of the PD is that over time, the committee will see an increase in academic achievement among actively participating ELLs and families. The implication for ELLs is that with increased support comes increased academic achievement.

Keywords: English Language Learner, English as a New Language Teacher, academic success, family engagement, academic support, academic achievement

Chapter 1

Problem

But he was doing so well... Like many ELLs before him, this English Language Arts student had been consistently making gains, buying into the learning process, and coming to school regularly, a major improvement from the previous year. The student had been making remarkable progress, and the English as a New Language (ENL) teacher and I had been collaborating to ensure his continued academic success in the upcoming years. Then, COVID-19 hit and instantaneously all of the learning stopped. The disparities among students reemerged with a vengeance, and teachers were left desperately attempting to connect with the student's mother. At this point, it became clear that as a school, we should have been making greater efforts to build a relationship with the mother and family.

According to the New York State Education Department (NYSED), 49% of students scored proficient or above on the 6-8 ELA State Assessment, while 9% of ELLs scored proficient or above (NYSED, 2019). Similarly, in math, 50% of students scored at the proficient level while 17% of ELLs achieved proficient scores. The data also shows that the general education graduation rates were 86% while for ELLs it is 39% and 1% graduate with an Advanced Designation diploma compared to 36% of general education students. The percentage of ELL students scheduled to graduate in 2019, but remain enrolled in high school was 31%. Meaning there was only a 6% difference in the number of ELL students earning a diploma vs. being retained in high school. Perhaps the most troubling statistic was the dropout percentage; 27% of ELL students scheduled to graduate in 2019 dropped out of high school (NYSED, 2019).

The personal experience described above, statistics from the NYS Education Department, accounts of teachers and former ELL students, textbooks, and research articles suggest a

common issue, many ELL students are not experiencing academic success in middle and high school. Educators know that, “although limited resources and the challenges of learning English may impede opportunities to learn, ELLs can learn and reach the highest levels of academic achievement” (Wright, 2015, p. 15). The fact that many ELLs do not experience academic success in middle and high school is a problem.

Significance of the Problem

Student experiences and achievements in middle and high school can have lasting effects on future academic, financial, and social endeavors. Student academic success in high school impacts college acceptances, high school graduation rates, and socio-economic outcomes. In addition to the problem itself, the frequency in which ELLs experience academic failure makes the issue even more significant. Experts in the field have documented the challenges and complexities related to academic success among English Language Learners. Wright (2015) emphasizes, “the U.S. education system has done an inadequate job in providing equitable educational opportunities to poor and minority students” (p.13). When most ELLs fall into one of these two categories, ELLs are disproportionately affected. According to Wright (2015), in 2008, only ten states reached the No Child Left Behind achievement goals for ELLs. In 2011, the Nation’s Report Card reported National Assessment of Education Progress (NEAP) scores exhibited similar statistics to the NYS Education Department, with only 5% of grade 8 ELLs scoring proficient or above in reading. These statistics show a nationwide trend that many ELLs are experiencing the opposite of academic success. The purpose of this project seeks to answer the question, how can schools increase the academic success of ELLs through the strengthening of home-school relations?

Linguistic Impact

Linguistically, this is an issue for a few reasons. ELLs must be proficient enough in English to meet various graduation requirements across the nation. Should an ELL student desire to go to college, a high school diploma, GED, SAT, and/or ACT scores will be examined in some capacity. Even without a high school diploma, many jobs will require some level of English proficiency.

Cultural Impact

In terms of cultural adjustments, experiencing academic success may go a long way in easing some of the stress and anxiety many ELLs experience. Allowing ELLs to tie cultural identities into the academic experiences may help ELLs to view bilingualism as a benefit rather than deficit. In some cases cultural identities of ELLs may include academic success, in these instances experiencing academic failure could cause family distress, emotional damage, and frustration making the cultural adjustment cycle even more complex. According to Bojko-Jeewek (2018), “ELL students’ academic performance is highly influenced by home culture and native language. Cultural identities affect students’ experiences academically, socially, and emotionally” (p. 79). Therefore, in some cases, providing opportunities for learning may not be enough. The emphasis on education in the United States may need to be openly communicated with some ELLs and families.

Assessment Implications

The complexity of assessments is arguably the most significant portion of the issue. When an ELL’s academic success is prohibited due to a lack of English proficiency on an assessment that is meant to test the student’s proficiency in math, the education system has failed that student. Secondary ELL students are at most risk for dropping out, “because of inadequate language

support and limited time for acquiring English and passing state-required exams” (Alexander, 2017, p. 3).

Purpose

In attempt to mitigate the issue of academic failure among many ELLs and answer the question, how can schools socially support ELLs to promote academic success through strengthening the relations between home and school? I propose creating a committee that provides additional academic, social, and cultural supports along with ELLs and ELL families. The committee will begin at the middle school level and move as a grade-level cohort through students’ high school careers. Prior to implementing an active committee a professional development will need to take place that serves as the foundation of the committee.

The professional development (PD) will be a 4-day PD required for ENL teachers and optional for additional members of staff, such as general education teachers, coaches, support staff, and administration. The goals of the PD will be to educate committee members of ELL academic statistics, brainstorm ideas to increase academic success through social supports, generate an ELL student and parent survey, revise ideas based on survey results, create a marketing plan, and hold a Family Night to kick off the official start of the committee. I considered naming the committee, ELLs for Success. However, I realized it might be more meaningful to allow the families to have a say in the naming.

Once established, the committee, along with ELLs and family members, will meet monthly for a family-style dinner to openly discuss academic struggles, personal struggles contributing to challenges at school, student academic goals, celebrate success, and community build. ELLs will also meet weekly with staff/teacher committee members to review academic goals and troubleshoot academic barriers. Mitigation of the issue will be tracked each semester using report

card grades, teacher anecdotes, assessment results, committee meeting parent/student attendance and parent/student survey results.

Conclusion

As educators, it is our responsibility to provide opportunities for academic success to all students. I should have made more of an effort to connect to the student's family before COVID-19 to develop a firm relationship between the school and family to ensure opportunities for academic success were consistent and supported. Due to the vastly unique circumstances in which many ELLs enter our classrooms, the challenges presented with standardized assessments, and external factors beyond student control, many ELL students are not granted those opportunities in a truly accessible manner. A lack of academic success among many ELLs can be detrimental to ELLs economic future and emotional wellbeing. In the following chapters you will find research to support the lack of academic success among ELLs and the benefits of social supports (Chapter 2) and a detailed PD that guides teachers and staff in implementing a social and academic support committee for ELLs and ELL families (Chapter 3). In Chapter 4, I will present my reflection and make recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This paper uses a sociocultural lens to examine the rate in which academic failure is experienced among ELL students, the factors impacting academic success, and potential solutions. Sociocultural theory focuses on learning as a social process and examines how students' opportunities and support can directly impact academic success and assessment trials, specifically among English language learners. In addition to language challenges, ELLs often come to the classroom experiencing new, vastly different environments, climates and cultural norms that can impact social-emotional health. By examining levels and sources of support in all three areas, this paper seeks to answer the question, how can schools increase the academic success of ELLs by strengthening the relations between home and school?

What Impacts the Academic Success of ELLs?

Perhaps the most easily overlooked factor contributing the academic struggles among ELLs is the fact that the ELL population itself is made up of extremely diverse group of students with drastic variances in circumstances. Yet, ELL students are often linked together and provided basic levels of support intended to meet all learners. In one classified classroom an ENL teacher may have a student from Sudan who has lost both parents and has had little to no access to formal education in the last two years. Another student from Mexico, in the top of her class in Mexico, but does not speak any English, as well as a student from Vietnam who migrated 10 years ago whose parents speak limited English, and whose siblings have also learned English over the past ten years. If those extremes are not differing enough, add a 7th grade student from Korea who took English in Korea, but had little opportunity to speak English with peers (Wright, 2015). Among those groups there are varying levels of education among students and parents, socio-economic conditions, structured support, race, ethnicity, and language.

Within each circumstance described above exists a set of unique challenges faced by the student that can impact academic success. For example, the student from Sudan has not had formal education in years and has lost both parents. This could impact the student in several ways. It may drive the student to extreme dedication and determination to be academically successful as a way to honor the student's parents, or the student could find the monotony of daily lessons meaningless in the light of previous experiences. Either way, it can be easily inferred that the student may find it difficult to reach commonalities among new peers.

In addition to life experiences, socio-economic status plays a large role. According to Wright, (2015) "over 60% of ELLs come from low-income families; about half have parents who never completed high school, and many of those have less than a 9th grade education" (p. 13). While socio-economic status does not determine low education achievement, there is a strong correlation between socio-economic status, parent education, and academic achievement. Lazar, et al. (2012) point out that poverty itself brings its own set of issues including its impact on family stability, access to resources, differences in home and school practices, and absence of supervision.

Cultural adjustment issues can also play a role in academic success among ELL students. Many ELLs are entering school and entering a climate that is not conducive to cultural norms. According to Portes and Rumbaut (2014) students who begin quickly exchanging heritage language and culture for the dominant one can experience increased home conflicts, academic struggles, and social difficulties. Often it is assumed that students must give up one's heritage language in order to learn English. Beliefs or misconceptions such as this can lead ELLs to feel isolated and experience a loss in self-identity. School cultures should encourage ELL students to

create positive sociocultural identities that encompass both worlds rather than picking one over the other (Wright, 2015).

If diverse circumstances, battles against poverty, and cultural adjustments are not challenging enough, high stakes testing adds a gravitational pull toward academic failure that even the most academically advanced ELL students may experience struggles. Standardized assessments are created with the intent of testing native-English speaker's knowledge on content. However, for ELL students the assessments end up being English proficiency exams. While accommodations exist depending on the classified proficiency level of the ELL student, the accommodations (extended time and location) do not aid in linguistic comprehension (Alexander, 2017). Many ELL students relatively quickly attain Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) to interact informally with peers and teachers. However, Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALPS) takes years, yet many ELL students are expected to take state assessments that require high levels of academic language proficiency and challenge even native-English speakers. Standardized assessments often fail to serve as evidence of learning for ELL students. These assessments do not show growth over a period of a year and do not accurately measure students' progress in learning the content (Wright, 2015).

High stakes tests needed for graduation place extensive pressure and stress on many ELL students. Alexander (2017) describes the dilemma of a senior Japanese sojourner who passed all but one portion of the Midwest Graduation Test (MGT) and almost had to return to Japan without a degree. In her culture, academic failure is an embarrassment not only to herself, but her family. In her small community all would believe that she was not academically successful during her time in the United States. She did end up passing the exam in August. However, she

missed the application and enrollment dates for Japanese universities. This is just one story of thousands relating to the unrealistic academic requirements placed on many ELL students.

Blaise (2018) studied a group of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students in Boston Public Schools and the of impacts high stakes testing. Blaise found that despite staff having high expectations for students, the resources needed to meet the expectations were not provided. Students conveyed being worried about two factors, graduation and passing the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment (MCA). Even students who were experiencing academic successes were stressed regarding passing the MCA due to linguistic concerns. Blaise brings attention back to Cummins (2000) claim that curricula for LEP students should define linguistic demands to ensure proficiency is adequate for a particular assessment. The study concludes with Blaise commenting on the unfortunate repetitive cycle of high stakes testing preventing the transition to college for many LEP students and thus allowing the continued privilege of the upper-class.

When considering the challenges described above it can be easy to confuse wanting to unburden students with beginning to lower expectations. McGriff and Protacio (2015) use a positional theory lens to describe different situations in which teachers can impact the academic opportunities ELLs are exposed. The article describes case studies where content area teachers failed to provide academically rigorous instruction and appropriate linguistic supports and where the ENL teacher failed to advocate for her students. Instead ELL students were scattered randomly throughout the room, were not provided opportunities to interact with general education peers, and were given basic recall assignments. It is a detrimental mistake to underestimate the learning ability of any student. However, it is specifically damaging when underestimating a student's ability to learn impacts the opportunities provided. Jimenez-Castellanos and Garcia (2017) found that when considering expenditures related to academic

programs specifically for ELLs versus general education funding, ELLs academic achievement was higher when general education programs were increased rather than just ELL programs resulting in higher level learning. This may be attributed to the fact that ELLs then had access to rigorous and advance coursework.

Potential Solutions

When a non-ELL student is struggling in a general education classroom, one of the first action steps of the teacher is to make parent contact. Why then, is that not the same for ELL students? As an ENL teacher, one solution for helping ELL students tackle some of the challenges associated with attaining academic language proficiency may start at home.

Panferov's (2010) article on increasing ELL parental involvement explains the significance in understanding the vast differences in ELL households. First, it is essential to understand the complexities ELL parents' experiences and to approach each situation appropriately. Some key factors to consider are how the ELL parents view literacy, what are the literacy practices in the home, expectations for the teacher and school based on one's cultural experiences and level of parental involvement. Panferov spent significant time getting to know two families. In both families literacy was valued and considered essential to education. For instance, the Pavlov family immigrated to the United States from Russia. Both parents were educated and had professional careers in Russia. Upon moving to the United States, the parents studied English. However, the children quickly surpassed the parents' English proficiency levels and the parents felt the need to continue to learning. Both parents read Russian and English newspapers, books, work documents, etc. The girls had a specific, quiet location in which schoolwork was completed, and literature in both languages, was accessible in the home.

Meanwhile, the Omar family emigrated from Somalia to the United States after the death of the father. Before moving to the United States, the mother worked in education and had a job with the government. She had several children varying from adult ages to adolescence. The children did not have a place to study, access to books, or a computer within the home. The academic experiences of the families were quite different. Both sets of students were receiving ESL instruction. However, the Omar children were struggling with behavior, attendance and graduation requirements, while the Pavlov children seemed to be excelling in academics with no behavior problems. Similar to many non-ELL students of poverty, the Omar students seemed to be experiencing complications related to socio-economic status, education level, living conditions, and environmental factors outside of the students' control –none of which have anything to do with cognitive ability to learn a second language, but can impact emotional ability and motivation to learn.

Panferov (2010) also focuses on the importance of parents being able to advocate for students, but that advocating must be culturally relevant. Panferov characterizes schools that are successful in helping ELL students mitigate challenges provide two-way communication opportunities for ELLs, parents, and the school by making the communication personally relevant. For example, personalized, in native languages (not automated), home visits, buddy-parents, educating parents on how to help, bilingual parent workshops, access to libraries, volunteer invites, schools events, and emphasizing the value of all languages rather than an English only focus.

Baker (2017) examines the importance of social support for academic success among ELLs. The study focuses on students who are currently enrolled in school and experiencing academic success. Baker shadowed five former ELLs in 5th grade enrolled in advanced courses and grade

point averages of 3.0 and above. The group was composed of a diverse population in terms of native language, socioeconomic status, race, number of years in the United States, and parent education level. The findings showed that there was no specific source of support that mattered more than another, but that not having versus having support did make a difference. A few common denominators among the academically successful students were social support in academic content, course selections, and student motivation. In terms of academic content, all but one of the students reported knowing how to get assistance with schoolwork from multiple sources. Two of the students used family members for academic content support such as a parent or sibling. These two students also had parents who attended universities and were English proficient. All of the students claimed academic support also came from peers. The students reported enjoying listening to other students explain concepts, working in pairs on math problems and doing homework with a friend. It is important to note that the students emphasized explaining and justifying responses on assignments rather than just copying the work.

One of the five students in Baker's study struggled in math class and reported a lack of academic support. The student reported that her parents were not able to help because the way the parents learned in Bolivia was different and the student's parents did not recall the specific skills. The student did not have academic support from siblings or other family members and stated family problems contributed to the complications. Despite afterschool tutoring being offered, the student did not attend –which drew attention to the fact that simply offering academic support may not be enough for all ELL students.

In terms of course selection, two of the students had parents who advocated for specific course loads. In one case, the student's sibling had taken advanced coursework, so the parents felt the student should be able to achieve similar academic results. In the other, the student had

struggled in advanced math the previous year. As a result, the father enrolled the student in summer school. After successful completion and a phone call to the guidance counselor, the student was re-enrolled in advanced courses. The two students whose parents advocated for advance courses were the same students receiving academic support at home (Baker, 2017).

Unlike the students described above, the three other participants did not receive support from home for course selection. One student was influence to take a vocational technology course because his older brother had enjoyed the course and it tied to his interest of automobiles. For the 4th student (the student struggling in math) course selection support came from the Spanish II teacher. The student excelled in Spanish and was encouraged to take the diagnostic exam for AP Spanish. The teacher served not only as a course selection support, but also as an emotional support for the student. Like the two students described in this paragraph, the 5th student did not receive course selection support from home. However, a school-based group called Scholars encouraged the student. According to the student the Scholars program is a program designed to support minority students with academics and leadership roles within the school (Baker, 2017).

The last factor in Baker's study that contributed to student success was motivation. In all five students the motivation was upheld through emotional support from family, teachers, parents or a combination of the three. With all five students, parents seemed to be a motivating factor in either wanting to meet parent expectations or make parents proud. Baker claims it is therefore important to communicate the need of emotional support from parents regarding academic success. It is also important to note that while all types and sources of support were important, one did not dictate over another and the source varied from student to student indicating that supports can be provided in multiple ways and may need to be fluid among parents and school staff. Particularly important, was the student with the unstable family background; the student's

relationship with teachers was a more important factor contributing to success than those of the other students. Baker ends her study suggesting “educators might move toward creating prototypes of ELLs possessing different background characteristics and then determining successful practices that might be associated with ELLs who possess particular characteristics” (p. 675).

With a similar mindset, Kanno and Cromley (2015) categorized stages of college planning among students and studied the pathways of over twelve-thousand students to determine which stages in particular contributed the most to the prevention of college attendance among ELLs. Students in the study were placed into one of three categories, native speaking (NS), English proficient (EP), and ELLs. Kanno and Cromley acknowledge previously reported challenges relating to socio-economic status (SES), college affordability, and immigration status. However, the study also indicated a lack of guidance from parents and schools as another factor. For parents of ELL students who did not attend college, a lack of experience may prevent parents from providing guidance. According to the study, 44.8% of native speaking (NS) students were enrolled in a 4-year college compared to only 19% of ELLs. Interestingly, the stages of college planning participation varied greatly as well; this issue may be a key factor to focus on in terms of increasing academic success. The categorized college planning stages were identified as aspiring to college, acquiring college qualifications, graduating from high school, applying to college, and enrollment. The results of the study indicated that only 58% of ELLs aspired to graduate from a 4-year college compared to 75% of NS students. Among that 58%, half of the students altered aspirations after reaching college qualifications. Actually graduating from high school did not appear to be a challenge among ELL students who reached college qualifications. However, applying to college was. While 80% of NS who aspired to graduate from a 4-year

college and attained adequate qualifications, only 62% of ELL students with the same milestones met submitted college applications. Another interesting insight that may be beneficial in terms of seeking to increase academic success was that the number of friends attending college did not seem to impact ELL students in the same way that it did NS students. Nor did the percentage of students who were graduating and attending a 4-year college from the same school. Kanno and Cromley mention that the possible suggestion here is that ELL students may not be accessing and consuming the college bound resources at school even when the resources are consistently available. Like Baker, Kanno and Cromley seem to have determined that academic success cannot be achieved through one level of support.

Harrod and Myers (2016) focus on how to support ELLs specifically in terms of academics. The authors summarize strategies such as using culturally diverse texts, home language to fill gaps and bridge learning, explicitly teaching reading strategies, using informational texts in creative ways and assessing using a variety of assessment types to obtain an accurate understanding of student learning. Much of the focus on support in the article emphasizes using students' heritage language and culture to promote engagement and motivation, suggesting that a socio-cultural lens in the classroom may help in creating meaningful lessons and increased learning.

Implication for Academic Success

The articles and studies outlined above allow for a few conclusions to be drawn regarding ELLs and academic success. In terms of generalized challenges ELLs may face, it is essential to first understand the diverse realities that exist among ELL students. For lack of a clearer image, the diversity within an ELL population in terms of SES, education level, cultural adjustments, race, ethnicity, and other variables can best be described as diversity among an already

diversified population. Therefore, applying the same blanket strategies in one area of support will not result in mass academic success. Similar to general education peers, ELL students have many factors contributing to the complexities of academic success and should therefore be supported in multiple ways.

External factors that can impact academic success among ELLs are in some ways similar to those of non-ELL students such as poverty, motivation, and support. However, in addition to predictable factors, ELLs bring unique complexities regarding cultural adjustment, language acquisition and opportunity access based on teacher expectations.

In response to these challenges, studies completed in hopes to level some of the challenges faced by ELL students have found similar conclusions. For example, the fact that an increase in the types of support presented to ELLs is consistent among studies. Types of support vary from academic, social, and parental support to continued advocacy against unrealistic assessment requirements. As a part of increased support, access to advanced coursework is also a reoccurring theme. Baker (2017) found that one possible characteristics of academic success among ELL students was advocacy for course selection either from a parent, sibling, or teacher. An inference can be made that when an ELL student shows particular skill or interest in a subject, the opportunity of advanced coursework placement should be provided just as it might be to a native-English speaking peer. The last reoccurring theme among the literature was that of culturally relevant coursework. Allowing and encouraging student access to literature, histories, and situations relevant to many cultural identities may help students maintain a strong sense of identity.

Using Previous Research to Support Professional Development

Based on the vastly diverse experiences of the students described by Wright (2015), Alexander (2017), and Baker (2017), an initial tool to be used in the professional development (PD) will be creating surveys for both ELLs and ELL parents in heritage languages to develop a clear understanding of the levels and sources of support, academic goals, and areas of need for each household. Similar to Alexander (2017), Jimenez-Castellanos and Garcia (2017), Blaise (2018), Baker (2017), and Wright (2015) the PD will include national and statewide statistics pertaining to the academic success of ELL students including graduation, dropout, and standardized assessment statistics to educate committee members on the significance of the problem pertaining to academic achievement among ELL students.

Like Baker (2017), the PD will incorporate parent and student surveys of both academically successful and unsuccessful ELL students. The surveys will take place to gain insight into the characteristics of both groups in hopes to continue making adjustments and establishing supports as the committee grows. As with all of the researchers described in this capstone, the PD group will read and reflect on readings from educators reporting on programs of success. Within the readings, the PD group will look for means of ELL support, increased parent involvement, and methods of data compilation. In attempt to increase advanced placement and academic achievement among ELLs, members of the committee will focus on finding areas of strength among individual ELL students and work toward a goal of advanced placement and/or a technical program enrollment in at least one course by the time the students reach 10th grade.

The overall findings of the literature review confirm that the majority of ELL students do not reach the same level of academic success as the native-English speaking peers. There does not seem to be one factor solely contributing to the lack of academic success experienced among

many ELL students. Rather, it is a culmination of challenges pertaining to external school factors, academic opportunities, cultural adjustment, language acquisition speed, and varied levels of supports that seem to prevent many ELLs from achieving full academic potential.

Therefore the question, how can schools increase the academic success of ELLs by strengthening home and school relations, can be answered by cultivating a social network that seeks to mitigate the challenges and increase learning opportunities. Wright (2015) clearly believes that having knowledge of student background and being able to balance social-emotional support along with seeking intrinsic motivations among students is important. Likewise, Panferov (2010) found that understanding students' home lives, home literacy practices, and parent experiences played a strong role in being able to predict academic struggles. Lazar et al. (2012) points out that SES has a strong correlation with academic achievement. Based on that fact alone, Baker (2017) might suggest that characteristics relating to academics among ELL students of low SES be compiled and used to create pre-intervention steps and strategies.

In terms of cultural adjustment, Portes and Rumbaut (2014) as well as Wright (2015) would argue that maintaining and fostering a sense of cultural pride and appreciation for heritage language is important for academic success. As a result, any social group seeking to increase academic success among ELLs should put emphasis and provide opportunities for shared cultural experiences such as field trips, festival attendance, potlucks, book clubs, and anything else deemed by parents and ELLs to be culturally significant.

Mitigating challenges regarding standardized assessments is a more complex matter. Due to the fact that many states require standardized assessments for graduation, the ineffectiveness of ELL assessment accommodations (Alexander, 2017), and the assessments do not assess ELL

content knowledge (Wright, 2015), increasing scores on standardized assessments may be a difficult feat. There are however, steps to be taken that can help ELLs cope with the pressures and stress related to standardized assessments. In addition, opportunities for tutoring, test taking strategies, and continued language proficiency support could be provided. Klein (2016) described the Los Angeles Unified School District's success with the district's Advanced English Language Development course. The course focuses on the needs of long-term English-learners who have obtained BICS but are still in need of academic content and language instruction. The courses are able to count as English courses toward graduation and focus on relatable, engaging issues while maintaining accessibility and rigor. Once established the parents and staff members of the committee may be able to propose a similar program.

Baker (2017) and Jimenez-Castellanos and Garcia (2017) would also argue for an increase in advanced placement opportunities. ELL students should not be disregarded when considering advanced placement courses due to language proficiency. If a student is excelling in a particular subject, increased opportunities to learn should be provided. The committee formed through the PD will be able to communicate to parents and students the benefits of advanced coursework and advocate for placement when appropriate.

Parental involvement is also a key factor in terms of academic success throughout the literature for a number of reasons. For one, understanding the level of parent involvement with academics and the literacy practices experienced at home can help committee members predict and take steps to support or increase parental support. Panferov (2010) clearly explains that it is not a lack of appreciation for literacy in the Omar household that prevents the parent from supporting the literacy of the children, but that lack of resources, SES, linguistic, and school-home communication factors impede opportunities at home. Forming a committee may support

increased parent involvement by providing parents with parent-buddies who speak the same heritage language, by providing literacy resources for the home, advocating for clearer communication from the school, and showing parents how support can be emotional in addition to academic.

Baker (2017) claims that supports including academic, course selection, and student motivation foster much of what the committee seeks to achieve. In all cases of academic success among the students Baker studied, all students were receiving support in all areas from a parent, sibling, school group, or teacher. Along the same lines, Kanno and Cromley (2015) would advocate for a heavy emphasis on college or career planning from an early stage. Based on the research findings and the implications presented, the need for and possible effect of a committee designed to support the academic success of ELL students seems a logical step to take toward increasing the academic achievement levels among ELLs.

In identifying the variables impacting the academic success of ELLs inferences can be drawn in that the outside challenges must first be mitigated, as it is not the lack of academic success causing the additional challenges, but the additional challenges impacting academic success. Therefore, when considering how schools can increase the academic success of ELLs, schools must first consider how to decrease the non-academic challenges preventing academic success. It is only when external needs are met that schools and students will be able to focus on academic rigor. Based on the literature review conducted, instances of districts providing societal and communal support have led to increased academic success. With these findings in mind, Chapter 3 describes a PD designed to establish a school-based committee dedicated to mitigating academic and non-academic challenges, establishing strong bonds with families, increasing advanced coursework access, and increasing the academic success of ELL students.

Chapter 3: Professional Development Overview

Professional Development Daily Tasks

Opener and PD Description

Identify which of the following is a lie, in my life I have lived in three different states, have fed a polar bear, and been skydiving twice. In order for the PD to serve its ultimate intention of increasing the academic success of ELL students in the district by increasing sources and quantities of support, the committee members themselves must become a community with a common goal. In attempt to help establish the community foundation, the beginning of each PD session will include a community building activity or two.

For the first session, participants will start by playing Two Truths and a Lie, Person Bingo, and finally participate in a community circle. The PD members will consist of teachers, coaches, support staff, administrators, counselors, and any other school personnel who have opted to be the founding members in a committee established to increase various types of supports for ELL students and families in hopes to strengthen home and school relations and academic success. At the conclusion of the PD and with that, the official start of the ELL supporting committee, ELLs and their families will be encouraged to join. As the committee continues through students' academic careers' it is hoped that even parents of graduated ELL students will remain on the committee and provide support.

The PD consists of four days of informing, researching, and planning in order to prepare for reaching out to families and officially starting the ELL support committee. Figure 1 shows a brief 4-day overview and will be presented toward the beginning of each PD session.

Figure 1*Brief Description of Daily Tasks and Activities*

Daily Overview
Day 1: Introductions, Data, and Statistics
Day 2: Brainstorm Support Ideas and Draft Survey
Day 3: Review Results, Create Action Plan, Brainstorm Marketing
Day 4: Marketing Strategy, Plan first family night, Create social media sites

*Day 1 Summary***Figure 2***Timeline of Day One's Tasks and Activities*

Day 1 Schedule
9:00 Introductions
10:00 Understanding the Issue: State and National Data Sets
12:00 Lunch
1:00 What Can Be Done: Researching Inspiring Support Structures
2:00 Idea Board for Committee Supports

Figure 2 shows a more detailed schedule of PD Day 1. Just as in the statement of the problem in Chapter 1 and the literature review of Chapter 2, committee members must be aware of the problem. As a result, the first half of Day 1's PD will be spent informing members of the state and national data sets pertaining to the academic success of ELLs. Links to NEAP and NYSED data will be displayed for members and opportunities for discussion will occur. In addition to state and national data sets, members will view two videos and participate in a reflection activity. The first video highlights the challenges many ELL students can experience when first starting school in the target language. The video takes a serious tone and encourages viewers to consider

various perspectives. The second video highlights a school in Baltimore that essentially uses Maslow’s hierarchy of needs to support students and families, allowing teachers to focus on academics. Both videos are intended to promote brainstorming of mitigation ideas for future sessions (See Appendix, Figure 1).

After lunch, members will review 10 articles that report on support models and programs for ELL students and families. Members will review at least 5 of the 10 articles and take notes recording ideas, questions, and thoughts. The purpose of the program review is to conduct informal research that provides insight into how ELLs can be supported. Similar to Blaise (2018), members will review instances of ELLs’ academic success and make inferences based on the reports. After reading, members will have time to discuss findings, brainstorm ideas, and consider challenges. Day 1 of the PD will end with members completing exit tickets describing member comments, questions, and concerns pertaining to the information provided.

Day 2 Summary

Figure 3

Timeline of Day Two’s Tasks and Activities

Day 2 Schedule	
9:00	Community Building
10:00	Review and Reflection: Continue Building Ideas
11:00	Survey Introduction
12:00	Lunch
1:00	Survey Drafts
2:00	Survey Review and Completion & Scheduling of Events

Figure 3 outlines Day 2 of the PD in which members are expected to begin brainstorming ideas for the goals of the committee, increasing ELL supports, and creating ELL student and parent surveys. PD members will be reminded that goals should pertain to strengthening home

school relations in attempt to support ELLs and increase academic success. The goals should include action steps that aim to strengthen the relations, such as family-style dinners, conversation topics like current academic struggles and advanced coursework options, celebrating successes, and sharing family needs. The idea of parent and student surveys was inspired by Baker (2017), in which the author interviewed parents and ELL students in attempt to identify characteristics of academically successful and unsuccessful students. The thought being, by identifying characteristics, attempts can be made proactively to increase supports early on. In addition, survey results may serve as indicators of external factors contributing to challenges faced by many ELL students such as SES, parent education level, academic support, and other variables. Again, the goal of the survey will be to knowledgably hypothesize barriers, take steps to mitigate, and increase parent engagement (see Appendix, Figures 5 and 6).

Day 2 will also serve as a planning day in which committee members schedule future committee events. Events may include monthly dinners to openly discuss academic struggles, personal struggles contributing to challenges at school, student academic goals, celebrate success, and community build. Weekly meetings with staff/teacher committee members to review academic goals and daily afterschool programs for academic support will also be scheduled.

*Day 3 Summary***Figure 4***Timeline of Day Three's Tasks and Activities*

Day 3 Schedule
9:00 Community Building
10:00 Presentation of Survey Results
11:00 Draft Action Plan
12:00 Lunch
1:00 Schedule Action Plan & Complete Calendar of Events
2:00 Start Planning Social Media Pages

Day 3 of the PD will take place approximately 2 weeks after the first two sessions to provide time for survey disbursement and data compilation. Figure 4 outlines the schedule that consists of a presentation of survey results, creating an action plan with survey results as a baseline for action steps and committee goals. The intention of reviewing the survey results, identifying annual goals, and establishing action steps is to ensure the committee remains focused on its overall goal of increasing supports for ELL students and families in attempt to increase academic success. The action steps detailed should consider attempting to provide additional language proficiency results to decrease gaps in standardized test results (Alexander, 2017), take purposeful steps to support ELLs from a variety of sources and means (Baker, 2017), increasing parent advocacy for students (Panferov, 2010), and increase celebration of students' heritage language and culture to increase motivation and engagement of both parents and students (Harrod and Myers, 2016). During Day 3, continuation of scheduling committee events may continue if needed. For the initial academic year, the dinners will take place in the school's cafeteria. Once established, the committee (including ELLs and parents) may choose to relocate or alter the design.

*Day 4 Summary***Figure 5***Timeline of Day Four's Tasks and Activities*

Day 4 Schedule
9:00 Community Building
10:00 Complete Advertising strategies for Family Night
12:00 Lunch
1:00 Social Media Administrators and Content Frequency

Figure 5 outlines a brief description of the last PD day. The final day will consist of allowing time for creating posters, flyers, announcements, social media displays, and planning the first Family Night. Members will need to think of this as almost an advertising event. Members will need to consider how get parents' and students' attention, increase comfort, motivate participation, explain how this event is different than school events from the past, and explain how the event will benefit the families and students. One possible idea may be to include meal questions on the survey. For example, "In preparation for an upcoming family-style meal at Family Night, what foods would you like to see present?" and to follow-up, "Would you be willing to help with or provide us with a restaurant that is able to provide those items?"

The measurement for success of the PD will be based on short and long-term data sets. For example, initial success will be based on percentage of ELL student and parent attendance of the first Family Night. For long-term progress, data-dives can take place during future committee meetings that review the frequency and quality of the afterschool program, the number of ELL students in attendance, the quarterly academic achievement of ELL students actively participating in the program, and future survey responses.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Introduction

This capstone examines the impacts of academic success on the social-cultural wellbeing of ELL students and families. The capstone seeks to answer the question, how can schools increase the academic success of ELLs by strengthening home-school relations?

Conclusions

In hopes of increasing awareness and mitigating the issue, I have created a professional development that seeks to strengthen relations between home and school for ELL students. The aim is to inform and inspire participants to initiate the conversations, home school connections, and increased academic access needed to ease the challenges experienced by ELL students. Graduation, college attendance, and dropout rates alone paint a grim picture of the country's current performance in successfully educating much of the ELL population and support on undeniable claim for change.

Implications for Learning

The research outlined in Chapter 2 indicates that students experience higher levels of success when support is provided at home and at school. More consistently, the students with both supports had increased access to advanced coursework and homework help. Therefore, the concept of strengthening the bonds between home and school environments for students may result in higher academic achievement. By consistently increasing student support through home school relations, monthly meetings, progress monitoring, opportunities for cultural pride, and access to consistent academic support, challenges preventing academic success may be mitigated.

Implications for Teaching

Despite significant quantities of research and studies regarding the learning process, challenges, and academic outcomes of ELL students, it seems teachers often do not know how to help ELLs in terms of increasing academic success. It is plausible that often, the task seems impractical when considering the numerous variables attributing to the issue. In response, by making the issue relevant at a school-wide level, teachers may feel more supported and more open to additional considerations in terms of ELL students and learning. In addition to widening the net, the PD provides an outline for identifying individual challenges experience at each school to allow action steps to take place in response to specific challenges rather than blanket solutions. The PD also outlines creating schedules and engagement ideas for future meetings in which the committee moves from seeking to involve parents into engaging parents. The goal is to increase feelings of ownership and pride as parents and students continue to participate over the course of their child's academic career.

Recommendations

The first step increasing the academic success of ELLs is to move awareness beyond the field of education. Parents should have access to supports that allow students to focus on academics rather than childcare, hunger, rent, and unrealistic graduation requirements. Next, districts need to take ownership for the success rates of the ELL population within each district and take actions, such as the ones outlined in this capstone, to mitigate the issue. At that time, when numerous nationwide initiatives exist, researchers can begin to assess the level of effectiveness and draw inferences based on findings. It is important to understand that learning is a process for everyone and just as learning English is a process for ELL students, learning how to support ELL

students in a way that maximizes academic success is a learning process for the nation's education system.

Final Thoughts

By examining factors contributing to academic failure, studying instances of academic success, and using both to create an action plan, this capstone seeks to answer the question, how can schools increase the academic success of ELL students through the strengthening of home and school relations? With so many variables impacting the efficiency of learning, it is not surprising that one form of in-school academic support such as an ESOL class is not enough to catapult ELL students' academic successes. As a result, it is the responsibility of districts, teachers, staff, and parents to help ELL students academically succeed. With the initiative starting at the school level and seeking to involve and engage parents as much as possible, the feat may not seem so monumental for parents, teachers, and most importantly, our ELL students.

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Figure 2*Note Taking Template for Article Review*

Ideas/Likes/Inspirations	Questions/Comments/Concerns	Miscellaneous Thoughts

Note. Committee members will be able to type responses into note taking template and plan discussions for the following session.

Figure 3*Exit Ticket for Day 1 Session*

Please use a sticky note at your table to record any comments, questions, or concerns you are leaving with today.

Note. Committee members will be able to type responses into note taking template and plan discussions for the following session.

Figure 4*Support Plan and Survey Brainstorm for Day 2*

Realistic/Implementable/Support Ideas	Means for Measuring Progress	Question Ideas for ELL survey	Question Ideas for Parent Survey

Note. Committee members complete initial support plan and draft potential survey questions for ELL and parent survey.

Figure 5*Parent Survey Revising Board*

Parent Survey Review	
Strengths	Questions/Concerns/Revisions

Note. Committee members complete initial support plan and draft potential survey questions for ELL and parent survey.

Figure 6

ELL Survey Revising Board

ELL Student Survey Review	
Strengths	Questions/Concerns/Revisions

Note. Committee members complete initial support plan and draft potential survey questions for ELL and parent survey.

Increasing Opportunities for Academic Success of English Language Learners By
Strengthening Home and School Relations

VoiceThread Presentation Link: <https://voicethread.com/share/14957146/>

Caitlin Mae Clinton

August 2020