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LATINO ADMINISTRATORS  
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## **White Paper**

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# ***English Language Learners: Incorporating Technology into the Academic Achievement Strategy***

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# *English Language Learners: Incorporating Technology into the Academic Achievement Strategy*

English language learners (ELLs)\* represent one of the fastest growing student audiences within education today. This group of diverse learners presents multiple challenges to educators, yet research has identified a number of successful strategies and resources to address their needs. This white paper presents an overview of:

- the diversity of this group
- the learning challenges facing ELL educators
- proven strategies for academic success
- the effectiveness of Rosetta Stone® Classroom in a sampling of ELL programs

Based upon census data from the 2010 survey, it is projected that Hispanics will make up half the population under the age of 18 by the year 2020, thus it is critical to ensure that they receive the education they need to succeed. By improving academic achievement for the growing population of English language learners, educators not only address the demands of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation but also the economic growth of our nation and quality of our workforce and citizens.

Effective technology solutions exist that enable ELLs to more quickly attain English literacy, thus increasing the likelihood that they will engage and invest in their learning and progress academically in all content areas. These technology solutions must be considered when developing a comprehensive ELL strategy.

*\*Please note that ESL, LEP, ELL, and EL have been used interchangeably over the years. For consistency purposes, this document will use ELL to include the current population of English language learners.*

## ELL Students Struggle with AYP

The current numbers regarding English language learners are compelling and increasing annually. May 2010 Title III reports present the following statistics regarding ELL students:

- The 4.7 million students identified as ELLs in 2007–08 constituted about 10 percent of the nation's K–12 student enrollment.
- This 2007-08 data represents an increase of about 150% over the 1989–90 data presented by a National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition report in 2008.
- Spanish speakers account for the vast majority of ELLs, although ELLs across the nation speak over 400 different languages.
- Seven states (CA, FL, TX, NY, IL, AZ, and NC) accounted for over 68% of the national K–12 ELL population in 2007–08.
- Nearly half of fourth-grade ELLs (44%) scored below basic (lowest level) in mathematics and nearly three-quarters (70%) scored below basic in reading.
- More than two-thirds of eighth-grade ELL students scored below basic in mathematics and reading (69% and 70%, respectively).

A 2008 policy brief published by the National Education Association (NEA) includes the following projections:

- Over the past 15 years the number of ELL students has doubled.
- By 2015, ELL enrollment will reach 10 million.
- By 2025, one out of every four public school students will be an ELL.
- Hispanics comprise 75% of the nation's language minority students.
- Hispanics drop out of high school at twice the rate of their white peers and are less likely to go on to postsecondary education.
- ELL students have a high incidence of transiency and mobility throughout a single school year and their educational journey.

Rates of growth in Title III-served students vary dramatically across states, but significant and sustained growth of ELLs is evident. Two states (NY, CA) report the largest rate of growth in Title III-served ELLs over the last 5 years, with over 200% more students enrolled in Title III-supported programs in 2007–08 than in 2002–03. Six states (AK, DE, IA, ME, MN, TN) reported over 100% growth in their Title III-served ELLs in that same time period. These growth trends are seen nationally in all 50 states, although not to this degree.

## Assessment Challenges with ELL Students

Significant research and documentation exists detailing the challenges with assessing the growth and development of English language skills by ELL students and the attainment of content knowledge. These challenges have been highlighted and more deeply investigated since the passage of the NCLB legislation because of the exceptionally high numbers of schools and districts in NCLB corrective action due to the lack of adequate yearly progress (AYP) attainment of their LEP (the federal classification for ELL students) disaggregate populations. The following presents a high-level overview of some of the most pressing assessment challenges.

### *Diversity across ELLs*

Speaking over 100 different languages, ELLs are a very diverse subgroup ranging from those who are fluent readers, writers, and speakers in their native tongue, to those who speak in local dialects that have no written counterpart. Surprisingly, 76% of the elementary school population and 56% of secondary ELL students are native-born U.S. citizens. Two-thirds come from low-income families and three-quarters are Spanish-speaking.

The primary commonality among ELLs is that they are not fluent in English reading, writing, and speaking skills. Unfortunately, the NCLB legislation focuses on and is structured around their few similarities rather than their vast diversity. The lack of clear language defining subgroups within the ELL population and a universal assessment measure to determine entry-level skills of ELLs prevents the quick identification of a “starting point” and selection of English immersion strategies at the individual student level.

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### *Short-Term Assessment ~ Long Term Learning Process*

Second-language learners progress through logical, predictable, and research-based phases, although the phases maybe described somewhat differently from one study to another. Most research concurs that the initial steps include the learner understanding spoken vocabulary and progresses to the learner being able to speak isolated words, phrases, and then sentences. Similar phases address being able to read written text, write words and sentences, and compose original narratives. The most accomplished ELL students are able to research, problem-solve, and think conceptually about complex narratives written in English. These advanced skills are

necessary to demonstrate proficiency on the high-stakes state assessments the ELL students are required to take to determine their AYP in reading, math, language arts, and science.

Depending on the entry-level language skills of the ELL student, the process of moving through these phases can take from 5 to 8 years. Currently, the AYP of ELL students is assessed in a three-year cycle, clearly not sufficient for even the strongest ELL students. To further complicate the assessment model, proficient ELL students are moved out of the subgroup and mainstreamed, with their assessment scores included in the ELL subgroup for only two years. Thus, the ELL subgroup is constantly being increased by the addition of new ELLs while the scores of those ELL students who are excelling are removed from AYP calculations after only two years. This situation makes achieving AYP for the ELL subgroup a nearly impossible mathematical accomplishment for school districts with high and increasing numbers of ELL students.

### ***Limited Availability of Quality Resources***

School districts with high ELL student populations tend to be ethnically diverse with significant numbers of low-income families. Frequently, the schools in neighborhoods serving these ELL students struggle to find and retain highly qualified teachers who are both talented bilingual educators and also content area certified, as required by NCLB. The changing requirements for paraprofessionals and the additional cost for these positions have also negatively impacted the number of bilingual paraprofessionals. In the past, these paraprofessionals have provided translation services allowing students, teachers, parents, and administrators to communicate more easily.

These neighborhood schools are also challenged financially to maintain adequate inventories of textbooks, digital resources, and instructional technologies. School district administrators and school leaders need to ensure that ELL students realize the maximum potential from existing resources by investing wisely in quality staff and proven technology solutions.

### ***Flaws in Current Standardized Assessments***

NCLB requires that ELL students be tested annually for language proficiency and content-related achievement. States are allowed to set their own growth expectations for the language proficiency levels, thus language proficiency assessments have proven less problematic than the achievement testing. The norm-reference tests used by many states in the areas of reading, math, language arts, and science do not typically include ELL students in the norming group. Thus, it is unclear at what level of English proficiency the English-language tests become meaningful. Likewise, the reliability of individual test items has been proven to present a

substantially lower level of reliability for ELL audiences. Both of these factors are likely to be significant in underestimating the actual content knowledge of ELL learners and negatively impacting AYP determination.

While not all-encompassing, this overview of the most prevalent challenges our schools face with respect to assessing ELL students skills and knowledge presents a snapshot of some of the most significant problem areas. Until these assessment issues are addressed at both the state and national levels, less emphasis should be focused on the tests and more attention on identifying strategies and solutions that are effective with this diverse collection of learners. The research data is clear, the more quickly ELL students are able to attain spoken and written English language skills, the greater likelihood they will remain in school, progress academically, and become productive citizens within our communities.

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## Strategies that Make a Difference

There is no question, the challenges are daunting but the focus must remain on providing effective, efficient, and engaging learning environments for ELL students. A review of the current research on best practices addressing the instructional needs of ELL learners highlights a number of successful strategies and trends.

With respect to creating environments that incorporate the wealth of technology tools and online resources, the following are noteworthy:

- Technology has become a universal motivator. Use available technology resources to motivate ELLs to invest and engage in their learning.
- Set high expectations and present ELL students with cognitively challenging, interactive, rigorous, and authentic curricular content. Use nonverbal cues, graphic organizers, video demonstrations, and illustrations to present new content concepts.
- Integrate the use of English language learning software, such as Rosetta Stone® Classroom, to offer individualized learning opportunities. Incorporate blogs and social

networking tools to provide practice with peer-to-peer and student-to-teacher written communication skills.

- Create multiple opportunities for oral language experiences, including smaller discussion groups to increase student conversation, online video conferencing discussion groups, and interactive software applications that record and repeat oral language.
- Integrate daily and weekly classroom assessments using student response systems and online surveys to monitor progress and provide immediate feedback. Analyze classroom assessment data to identify individual student knowledge gaps and determine groupings for reteaching core content concepts. Provide students with positive feedback and classroom assessment information.

To address the learning needs of the whole child and create a positive school experience, the following have proven successful:

- Support and scaffold student language development to promote success by creating environments where students will feel comfortable taking linguistic risks. For example, pre-teach background knowledge and key vocabulary before each new concept.
- Incorporate culturally relevant themes into English language instruction and content development to connect the curriculum to students' experiences in their homes, communities, and schools. Embracing a multicultural learning environment supports the growth and development of confident students who value school and value themselves as learners.
- For secondary students, provide advance organizers for note taking during teacher instruction, such as an outline or presentation slides with key words omitted. This provides students with a framework for learning while encouraging active listening.
- Enhance interactions with the families of ELL students. Develop communication channels that create a network of support and services to reinforce effective practices within the school, the family, and the community. These might include weekly or monthly newsletters in both English and the family's native language and/or classroom websites that can be presented in multiple languages. Make online learning tutorials available to English-learning family members as licensing allows for homes with web access.

These strategies clearly demonstrate that there is no one path to academic excellence, but there are proven factors that contribute to success for English language learners. These include quality staff with the knowledge and skills to address ELL students' linguistic and cognitive needs; school-wide emphasis on English language development and standards-based instruction; shared priorities and high expectations; and systematic, ongoing assessment to guide instruction.



## Rosetta Stone Results

Despite the staggering statistics and the complexity of addressing the challenges of ELL students, tens of thousands of schools across the nation and around the globe have experienced success with Rosetta Stone Classroom and English language learners. The following programs illustrate a few of these successes:

- Centralia School District, California
- Cinnabar Elementary School, California
- Hueneme Elementary School District, California
- Lawrence Public High School Learning Center, Massachusetts
- Manor Independent School District, Texas
- Washington Elementary School District, Arizona

### ***Centralia School District (CSD), Orange County California***

ELL students in all nine K-6 Centralia elementary schools (approximately 4,700 students) now have access to Rosetta Stone Classroom. Implemented initially in three schools, the program was expanded throughout the school district in 2008 after two years of successful implementation. ***In 2009 for the first time in Centralia School District's history, they achieved their Title III No Child Left Behind accountability levels.*** They credit this accomplishment in large part to the implementation of Rosetta Stone Classroom.

CSD has a significant number of students without proficiency in the English language, living below the poverty line, and presenting high-mobility levels. Rosetta Stone Classroom enabled CSD to provide immediate language learning experiences that were immersive, personalized, engaging, and effective. Regardless of the entry skills of the students or their attendance history, Rosetta Stone Classroom presents instruction that is matched to a student's skill level and picks up from where s/he left off during the previous session.

The Centralia School District also initiated before-school programs using Rosetta Stone Classroom with some of their children in greatest need. They plan to expand this effort to after-school and parent-child programs in the future. They clearly have found a solution that works and are focused on expanding their English Language Learning efforts as time and resources allow.

Additionally, staff at CSD is encouraged to use Rosetta Stone to learn another language. School district administration believes that this language learning by staff will translate into an

improvement in the staff's ability to teach, communicate with parents, and provide the best education for all students.

For more detail, a 4-page case study of the Centrailla School District can be downloaded from the Rosetta Stone website at [www.rosettastone.com/schools](http://www.rosettastone.com/schools).

### ***Cinnabar Elementary School (CES), Petaluma, California***

Rosetta Stone Classroom is one of two applications selected by the Cinnabar Elementary School as core components of the *Cinnabar Elementary School District Master Plan for English Language Learners*. As stated in this master plan, "Rosetta Stone addresses key factors that researchers believe must be present in order for successful language learning to take place. By merging interactive technology with listening comprehension, structure and sequence, deduction and problem solving, and readiness to talk, Rosetta Stone provides a sound framework for students acquiring a new language. Developed with teachers and students and based in language-acquisition research, Rosetta Stone meets the requirements of No Child Left Behind for methods based on established principles of language acquisition."

English language learners comprise half of the school's student population, with 69% qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch. To ensure access by ELL students to Rosetta Stone's resources, Cinnabar has computers in every classroom and classes use the computer lab for multiweek projects. In addition, upper-grade students are permitted to use the computer lab during their lunch period. Cinnabar Elementary uses Rosetta Stone Classroom to engage students and provide the structured one-on-one English practice they require.

Based upon California statewide assessments in the spring of 2009 compared with the spring of 2010, the ELL subgroup at CES exceeded their target growth of 5 by 29, achieving a 34 Academic Performance Index (API) growth rate. ***This represents the highest growth result for any subgroup within the school.***

### ***Hueneme Elementary School District (HESD), California***

Students, parents, teachers, and administrators in the Hueneme Elementary School District all use Rosetta Stone Classroom! HESD serves approximately 8,000 students in 11 schools through grade eight. The school district's journey with Rosetta Stone began nearly ten years ago in 2002, when district ELL funds were invested in licensing for Rosetta Stone in all of their language labs. The school district designed a program to address the needs of their ELL students during the school day and their parents in the evenings.

Over the past nine years, the use of Rosetta Stone Classroom has expanded to include Saturday school, before- and after-school programming, and a highly successful and very popular summer school program for their ELL students. The hesitation, reticence, and fear of failure initially demonstrated by both students and parents have long since disappeared. Now both groups enjoy, request, and sometimes demand computer time using Rosetta Stone Classroom.

HESD is currently using the most recent version of Rosetta Stone Classroom with consistent and positive results. *The vast majority of HESD ELL students are making significant annual gains and many are closer and closer to reaching their AYP targets.*

Approximately 90% of HESD ELL students are Hispanic. The remaining audience requiring English skills is very diverse, including students who speak Tagalog and Mixteco. The school district also purchases Rosetta Stone Classroom licenses for languages other than English for teachers and administrators to expand their language skills as a component of their professional development program. School district leadership acknowledges that increasing staff language skills supports better ongoing communication with families.

### *Lawrence Public High School Learning Center, Massachusetts*

During the 2008-2009 school year, a small Action Research project using Rosetta Stone Classroom was conducted at the High School Learning Center (HLC) with students from their “Newly Arrived” program. These students include immigrants who have arrived in the United States within the past two years and generally cannot read, write, or speak English, nor do they know a proper Spanish language. The vast majority of this population also exhibits behavioral problems, lack good interpersonal skills, and have received limited formal education in their native countries.

Despite its small size, implementation issues, and limited duration, this Action Research project demonstrated significant positive outcomes with a high correlation to the implementation of Rosetta Stone Classroom. This research project also exemplifies the challenges faced by educators across the nation who serve this growing audience. Students whose data was included in this Action Research project had to meet three criteria:

- 1) Students had to take the prescribed pre-test (Measures of Academic Progress – MAP by Northwest Evaluation Association, or NWEA) for both reading and math.
- 2) Students had to use the Rosetta Stone Version 3 software daily for 50 minutes during the 5-month project period.
- 3) Students had to take the prescribed post-test (again MAP assessments in NWEA).

Despite this relatively low threshold for inclusion in the study data, the universe for this Action Research included 59 students from a population of 119, representing approximately 50% of the students enrolled in the Newly Arrived program.

Many of the issues noted above with regard to assessing the skills of this audience were observed, including both attendance on testing dates and attention to the questions during the actual testing experience.

***The conclusion reached by this Action Research is that the Rosetta Stone program produced enough reading competencies to enhance classroom lessons and increase MAP math test scores.*** It is important to note that Lawrence reliably uses the MAP scores as a predictor of student achievement on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment Program (MCAS).

Additionally, the author of the Action Research project observed the following positive outcomes from Rosetta Stone Classroom implementation:

- Increased attention span and student engagement in learning
- Reduced discipline problems during Rosetta Stone computer lab time
- Student requests to remain in the computer lab to complete lessons
- Several student requests to use Rosetta Stone from home

To request a copy of the full Action Research document please contact a Rosetta Stone language consultant at 800.811.2819.

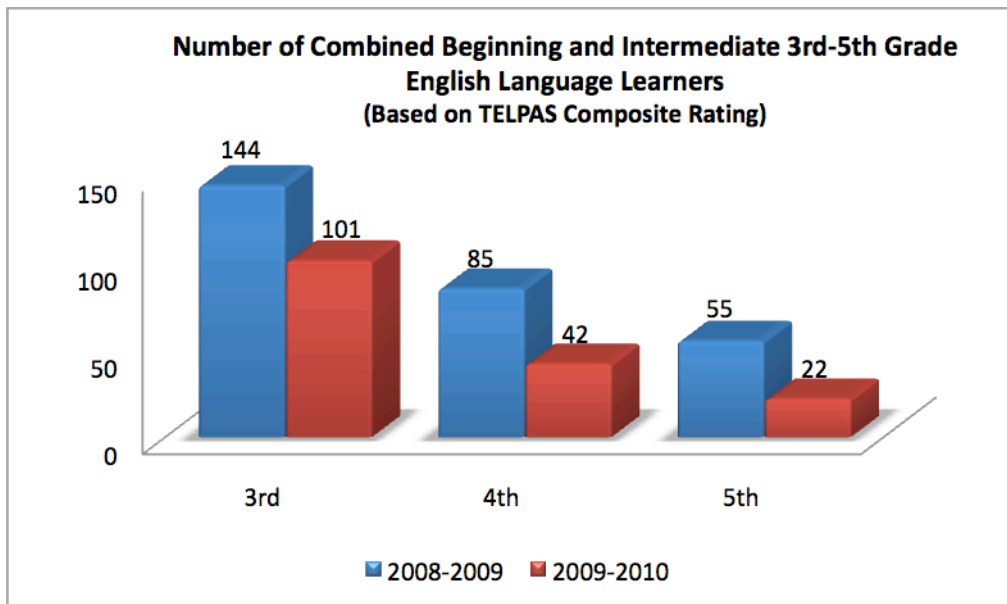
### ***Manor Independent School District (ISD), Texas***

Located just northeast of Austin, Manor ISD is a growing district currently serving over 7,200 students, 30% of which are ELL students speaking at least 26 different languages. Starting in September 2009, all 3<sup>rd</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade students rated Beginning or Intermediate (by composite score) in the previous year's Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) administration, approximately 425 students, were issued a web-based license for Rosetta Stone Classroom to work toward improving their English language skills. The district expectation was that all students would utilize the program for at least 30 minutes, 3 times per week during a time period outside of content area instruction and intervention time.

The goal of this initiative was to provide students with an interactive English language learning program that would not only improve students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in

English, but also improve self-confidence in both academic and social interactions. If successful, Manor ISD expected a decrease in the number of Beginning and Intermediate ELLs over time.

The results of this effort are significant. Upon receiving TELPAS scores at the end of 2009-2010, considerable gains were found among students who utilized Rosetta Stone Classroom throughout the school year. **Across the district, 30% of 3<sup>rd</sup> graders, 51% of 4<sup>th</sup> graders and 60% of 5<sup>th</sup> graders who participated in the program made significant progress, increasing their English language skills into the advanced or advanced high composite levels.**



For more information on Manor's ELL program and services, please visit the district website at: [www.manorisd.net/inside/departments/bilingual](http://www.manorisd.net/inside/departments/bilingual)

### **Washington Elementary School District (WESD), Arizona**

Washington Elementary School District is the largest elementary district in the state of Arizona, serving more than 25,300 students in 32 schools in the Glendale area of the state. WESD implemented Rosetta Stone Classroom across the school district in 2005 to help drive achievement and integrate its large population of non-English speaking students, who spoke 50 different languages.

Rosetta Stone Classroom was initially used on the language lab computers, but after just one year was expanded to be available on every computer throughout the school district. This strategy provided ELL programming that met the need of a wide range of learners with attaining language skills in an engaging format at their own pace.

*Rosetta Stone Classroom proved so successful in WESD that its use has been expanded to after-school programs, adult education programs, and family literacy classes.* Rosetta Stone Classroom is a strategy that aligns with the school district's philosophy of engaging the whole family with learning experiences that are immersive, interactive, and personalized.

For more detail, a 4-page case study of the Washington Elementary School District can be downloaded from the Rosetta Stone website at [www.RosettaStone.com/Schools](http://www.RosettaStone.com/Schools).

## Conclusion

There is no question that the ELL students in our nation's schools are a diverse and challenging audience. Their numbers are growing annually and many struggle to achieve AYP. Despite these challenges, educators have identified and implemented strategies enabling ELL students to successfully learn English and, subsequently, core content material. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom, the integration of technology tools and resources to support research-based pedagogy is an imperative. Rosetta Stone Classroom has proven successful as an integral component of a contemporary and comprehensive ELL program.

The identification of effective strategies and proven resources is only the first step to achieving results with individual ELL students. These strategies and resources need to be matched to the student's learning style, current level of language development, and the daily challenges s/he faces in their home environment. Educators with a deep understanding of the needs of ELLs at all literacy levels are necessary to support instruction and continued progress. Bringing all these variables together consistently over the duration necessary to result in long-term, lasting language acquisition will continue to be a daunting challenge for schools across the nation.

As the challenge continues, so must the resolve of school district leaders seeking to address the immediate learning needs of EEL students and future of our nation's workforce and citizens.

For additional information on Rosetta Stone Classroom for education, please go to [www.rosettastone.com/schools](http://www.rosettastone.com/schools) or call to speak with a language consultant at 800.811.2819.

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