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STATEMENT OF

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on behalf of

THE SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

AND THE PROMISE INITIATIVE

(Pursuing Regional Opportunities for Mentoring, Innovation and Success
for English Learners)

before the

COMMITTEE OF EDUCATION AND LABOR,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD, ELEMENTARY,
AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

on

IMPACT OF NCLB ON ENGLISH LEARNERS



San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools

Good morning Chairman Kildee, Ranking Member Castle, and members of the Subcommittee. I am Francisca Sánchez, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction of the San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools Office in Southern California. Today, I am pleased to be here to represent San Bernardino County as well as five additional Southern California county offices of education that comprise the PROMISE Initiative—a six county collaboration for English Learner reform and success. Our partnership includes the county offices of education of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, and Ventura.

The needs of English Learners in my county and throughout our six county partners are huge. In San Bernardino County alone, almost 90,000 students are English Learners. This represents one in five of our students. Based on data from the California Department of Education, we know that within the state of California, over one fourth of all students are English Learners, and that 64% of all English Learners in the state attend school in one of our six counties. We're talking about over 1 million students (1,008,140). Yet, only 7% of our English Learners receive FULL access to both the English Language Development) and the core academic curriculum they need to meet the requirements of NCLB and to succeed in school. This is a recipe for educational and societal disaster.

NCLB requires that all students reach proficient or higher levels of academic achievement within 12 years. Currently, at second grade, only 21 to 32% of English Learners in the six PROMISE counties meet the proficient standard in Language Arts. At the 11th grade, only 4 to 6% test at or above proficient. At the high school level, only 29% of English Learners tested in the six PROMISE counties have passed the California High School Exit Exam in English Language Arts compared to 72% of English only students. On the Mathematics exam, 49% of English Learners passed, compared to 78% of English only students.

What does this mean for schools and districts relative to NCLB? San Bernardino County provides an example of the consequences. Here, we see an alarming trend where the majority of the ninety plus schools in Program Improvement are there based on the academic gaps experienced by our English Learner students.

We see a similar pattern when we consider who teaches English Learners. Although NCLB requires that EVERY student be taught by a highly qualified teacher, English Learners are twice as likely as students in general to be taught by a teacher who is not fully credentialed.

Taking these demographic and performance data into consideration, the **PROMISE Initiative** proposes a bold shift in how we deliver successful programs to these students, not only in the local geographic area, but nationwide. It provides an alternative to highly negative consequences of continuing to school our English Learners for failure.

The PROMISE Initiative

As mentioned above, the **PROMISE Initiative** is a collaboration of six county offices of education in Southern California who have risen together to boldly and innovatively address the needs of English Learners and to build a vision and model that can be replicated throughout our state and the nation. The ultimate goal of the **PROMISE Initiative** is to ensure that English Learners achieve and sustain high levels of academic, linguistic, and multicultural competency, and are successfully prepared for 21st century citizenship.

The **PROMISE Initiative** is in the beginning phase of a three-year pilot study (2006-2009) to advance a powerful vision of English Learner success. Within the six counties, six school districts and 15 schools (PreK-12th grade) are participating in a customized pilot program to meet the specific needs of the English Learners at their sites. Each district and school is using local funds to support their work in **PROMISE**, and they have expressed their commitment to PROMISE from all levels – district and site leadership, teachers, students, parents, and targeted support from county offices of education.

The **PROMISE** approach promotes simultaneous delivery of language/literacy development and rigorous academic content instruction systemically throughout a school district. As a result, schools and districts will close the achievement and access gaps and increase college-going rates for English Learners, and achieve high levels of parent satisfaction and support. **PROMISE** is not a curriculum or specific program, but rather it is a research-supported, principles-based reform model that addresses the needs of English Learners throughout the entire school system (i.e. district, school, community, county). The research-based core principles to realize this vision are:

- *Enriched & Affirming Learning Environments*
- *Empowering Pedagogy*
- *Challenging & Relevant Curriculum*
- *High Quality Instructional Resources*
- *Valid & Comprehensive Assessment*
- *High Quality Professional Preparation & Support*
- *Powerful Family & Community Engagement*
- *Advocacy-Oriented Administrative & Leadership Systems*

The **PROMISE Initiative** embraces a vision that English Learners will achieve and sustain high levels of proficiency, including literacy, in English and the home language; high levels of academic achievement, including proficiency on state standards across the curriculum and maintenance of that achievement in English after participation in specialized English Learner programs and through grade 12; sophisticated sociocultural and multicultural competency; preparation for successful transition to higher education; successful preparation as a 21st century global citizen; and high levels of motivation, confidence, and self-assurance.

The **PROMISE Initiative** uses a gold standard of research employing the NAEP, NCLB, state, and local standards, as well as performance based assessments and student surveys, to measure English Learner achievement in acquiring English and learning academic content. At the conclusion of the three-year pilot study, the research and evaluation findings will be published and **PROMISE** will move into a five-year field study to replicate and expand the vision of **PROMISE** to schools and districts in California and the nation. The six Southern California **PROMISE** counties are in a critical position and have the combined knowledge/experience base to powerfully and positively affect education for English Learners nationwide through the **PROMISE Initiative**.

Impact of NCLB on English Learners

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today about the impact of No Child Left Behind on English Learners and to add to the national dialogue on this very important issue.

Let me begin by highlighting a few key points about our position on and approach to the impact of NCLB on English Learners.

- English learners are most often the subgroup that has not met AYP targets in schools that are classified as Program Improvement. To add to the educational challenges in California, the achievement gap between English only students and English Learners has grown every year since the 2002-03 school year.
- English Learners must meet the same rigorous standards set for all students. It is essential that NCLB allow various paths to reach that goal without labeling students and schools as failures. Currently, NCLB requires English Learners to meet standards at the same pace as others while a significant portion of these students is doing double work - learning a second language and striving to reach high academic standards.

- While acknowledging and understanding that the intent of NCLB and other policies regarding English Learners has been to provide key guidelines and support for their success, we have come to the careful conclusion that several areas of NCLB need revision in order to truly have an impact on English Learners in our schools. The areas that we have identified include:
- Assessment and Accountability System for English Learners
 - Sanctions and Interventions
 - Reading First
 - Highly Qualified Teachers/Professional Development
 - Paraprofessionals
 - Supplemental Educational Services (SES)
 - Parent and Family Engagement

Assessment and Accountability System for English Learners

One of the greatest areas of impact of NCLB in our state and in the nation has been in the implementation of assessment and accountability systems—not just for English Learners, but also for all learners. To best reflect the abilities of our English Learner students and in order to assure accurate and reliable results, states must be held accountable for implementing an assessment and accountability system that uses valid and reliable instruments to yield accurate data as to what an English Learner knows and can do.

A revised NCLB should ensure that the English Learner testing provision *requires* testing “in a language or form that most accurately reflects what students know and are able to do”. Tests in the home language, modified English tests, and other appropriate measures need to be a part of each state’s system until students’ English proficiency allows them to compete on tests developed for native English speakers. Guidelines on appropriate testing accommodations for English Learners need to be provided and states need to be monitored on their statewide implementation of these accommodations. Additionally, in order to make the aforementioned a reality, it is key to significantly increase research and investment in the development of appropriate assessments and accommodations.

Because NCLB has rightly focused on measuring the success of students from several subgroups to allow for clear and careful analyses of the data, it is important that English Learners are maintained as a subgroup and that the data are disaggregated for two distinct purposes: 1) Under Title III, English Learners in U.S. schools *three years or less* must be included in AMAOs I and II (and AYP only if documented accommodations yield valid and reliable results for this subgroup); and, 2) English Learners in the U.S. *more than three years* should be included in both the Title I AYP and Title III AMAO calculations with appropriate accommodations geared to different English Learner proficiency levels.

And finally, any growth model should include longitudinal student data that disaggregate English Learner data by proficiency in home language and English, time in program, and type of services/programs. Currently, we have found an inconsistency in the way data are collected and accounted for, often just giving a one-year view of student growth and progress that inadequately or inaccurately predicts sustainable, long-term success.

Interventions

With accountability at the center of our discussion around student success, we understand the role interventions and eventually sanctions play to ensure that the needs of all students are addressed; however, interventions need to be based upon data that accurately reflect what English Learners *know and can do*. We have seen case after case where English Learners are lumped into one large category, not accounting for their distinct language levels and background educational experiences. It is imperative that the data that are used to define the most effective intervention needs account for the students' level of English and home language proficiency, time in U. S. schools, previous level of education, and the types of program services provided.

There is extensive research and documentation in the field regarding the best and most effective practices and strategies for English Learners—our **PROMISE Initiative** espouses many of them in our approach to English Learner success. Regrettably, in the quest to reach compliance with NCLB, many of our schools, for a variety of reasons, move forward on decisions regarding reform for English Learner programs without taking that research into consideration. In order to have the kind of powerful growth called for by NCLB, interventions must rely on research-based practices that promise long-term, sustainable, high level success for English Learners in first and second language development AND academic achievement. If and when schools enter into Program Improvement status, it is imperative that they contract with personnel/entities that have experience and expertise with English Learners. Similarly, sanctions for schools in Years 4/5 Program Improvement must reflect a wide array of new program options for alternative governance, such as biliteracy, dual language, structured English immersion, Spanish for native speakers, and others documented as successful with English Learners.

Reading First

NCLB has provided our schools and districts nationwide with targeted approaches for literacy development through Reading First. It is imperative, once more, to stress that any program or approach that intends to impact English Learners directly address the differentiated needs of students based on language acquisition and educational experience. In the case of Reading First, states must be held accountable to develop research-based approaches and materials that specifically accelerate language development and literacy for

English Learners and that maintain this accelerated progress over several years in order to close the achievement gaps. The professional development designed for the Reading First program must prepare teachers to differentiate instruction to address the language proficiency and literacy needs of English Learners. To accurately reflect the teaching and learning that has occurred, the evaluation design and assessments in state Reading First programs must be valid and reliable to demonstrate what English Learners know and can do, and how this growth is able to be sustained over time.

Highly Qualified Teachers/Professional Development

As I noted in my introduction, while NCLB requires that EVERY student be taught by a highly qualified teacher, English Learners are twice as likely as students in general to be taught by a teacher who is not fully credentialed. According to “Teaching and California’s Future” (2006) published by the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, CSU Office of the Chancellor, UC Office of the President, Policy Analysis of California Education, and WestEd, one of the greatest teacher preparation shortages in the state is in the area of teachers for English Learners. In fact, in 2005-06 only 56% of fully credentialed, experienced (more than five years of teaching experience) teachers had English Learner authorizations. While this is a dramatic increase from over five years ago (34%), given the nature of instruction and the fact that English Learners are incorporated throughout virtually all classrooms in schools where they are present, the percentage must be much higher to ensure effective academic instruction for English Learners.

Given this context, in response to the teacher professional development components of NCLB, we strongly recommend that the definition of highly qualified teachers be expanded and clarified to require that teachers who provide instruction to English Learners have the appropriate EL authorization. Teachers in all core subject areas who are assigned to provide instruction to English Learners should be explicitly required to receive professional development in English Language Development (ELD), Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE), and/or primary language instruction. To support this type of focused teacher professional development, a key factor would be to re-institute federal grants for graduate students in ELD and bilingual education.

Paraprofessionals

In addition to focusing on high quality professional development for teachers, NCLB has recognized the key role that paraprofessionals play in the education of all students. To specifically address the growing needs of English Learners, it is distinctly important to require that paraprofessionals working with English learners be provided with training and professional development to address their

working knowledge and implementation of first and second language acquisition and other appropriate strategies. Career ladder opportunities are needed that lead to appropriate English Learner certification, along with teaching credentials.

Supplemental Educational Services (SES)

NCLB has targeted additional support for English Learner students via the Supplemental Educational Services. Concentrated, focused approaches in SES programs have been proven to support student academic growth and engagement if they are closely aligned to the goals and practices of the school's educational program. Such services can and should play a role in supporting English Learner students by specifically ensuring that parents are given sufficient information to make informed decisions regarding SES providers and that the information is provided in the language spoken by the parents.

The role of the SES provider, obviously, is instrumental in how successful the program will be. SES providers who work with English Learners should be required to have the knowledge and skills necessary to teach English Language Development and rigorous, grade-level appropriate, standards-based content instruction appropriate to the various language proficiency levels of the students. Providers should be required to deliver instruction consistent with the language of instruction during the school day for the designated subjects

Community Building Parent and Family Involvement

As we have addressed the impact of NCLB for English Learners in areas such as accountability, professional development, and educational programs, we recognize that the underlying foundation for the success of our students draws from the primary role of parents and family. NCLB has strongly influenced the importance of the role of parent and family engagement as a key factor to student success and indeed has recognized parents as students' first and on-going teachers. We have greatly appreciated the emphasis that has been placed on the role of parents and community in effective programs for English Learner students. To maximize the impact of parent and family engagement, we recommend that parent advisory committees be required to include representation of English Learner parents and specific roles for their involvement, that there is an increase in the percent of funding that is allocated to parent involvement, and that an independent audit of states' implementation of the required parent involvement/community building mandates be implemented.

Conclusion

It has been my pleasure and an honor to share the work we are doing on behalf of English Learners and to highlight the impact of No Child Left Behind in the Southern California region. Through this opportunity to testify on this panel, I am hopeful that the true needs and concerns of English Learners will be addressed.