

# Immersion Not Submersion

*Volume III*

*Can a New Strategy for Teaching English  
Outperform Old Excuses?  
Lessons from Eight California School Districts*

By David White, Adjunct Scholar

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1600 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 900  
Arlington, VA 22209

Tel: 703.522.5828 Fax: 703.522.5837

[www.lexingtoninstitute.org](http://www.lexingtoninstitute.org)

[mail@lexingtoninstitute.org](mailto:mail@lexingtoninstitute.org)

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## Executive Summary

This paper compares the performance of English language learners on standardized tests in eight California school districts: Alum Rock Elementary, Atwater Elementary, Long Beach Unified, Los Angeles Unified, Oceanside Unified, Orange Unified, San Jose Unified and Vista Unified.

The school districts responded differently, with varying results, after Proposition 227 passed in 1998. The ballot initiative sought to dismantle the state's bilingual education system and replace it with a system of English language immersion.

This is evidenced in student performance on two statewide exams, the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) and the California Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program, which show significant improvement in English proficiency across the state.

But even those that made a gradual shift to instruction in English are now starting to show important gains. Often educators and administrators blame a lack of progress toward English fluency on any combination of three main factors: 1) low per-pupil spending; 2) large class sizes, and 3) negative socio-economic conditions, such as poverty.

This paper analyzes how those factors correlate to data from recent CELDT and STAR results at eight school districts. It demonstrates that by making strong educational decisions about how children can best acquire critical English language skills, schools can overcome challenges such as poverty, lower per-pupil spending and class size.

Details follow.

## Introduction

In 1998, California voters overwhelmingly passed Proposition 227, a ballot-initiative formally dismantling the state's bilingual education system and replacing it with a system of English language immersion.

After the measure passed, school districts across California were charged with the task of instructing all students "overwhelmingly" in English. Most had not done so before. California schools had to completely revamp their English-learner programs, regardless of whether they were from large districts or small districts; whether they had a high or low percentage of English learners; or whether their learners were mostly Hispanic or not.

Their challenge was straightforward: teach students English *through* English.

Opponents of Prop. 227 had predicted the measure would spell disaster for California's English learners. Certainly the response to the law has been uneven. But overall, the mandate has resulted in a large, demonstrable improvement in English proficiency across the state.

This improvement is best evidenced in results from both the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) and the California Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program, as this paper discusses.

Further, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2005 American Community Survey, school-age children from Spanish-speaking households across California are gaining English fluency at record rates. In San Diego, for example, English-fluency among children ages 5 to 17 in Spanish-speaking households jumped from 60 percent to 71 percent between 2000 and 2005.

Despite this general improvement, success has remained elusive for a number of California districts. Partly this is due to unevenly-applied policies, as will be discussed.

The lagging performance of these districts has been blamed on any combination of three main factors: 1) low per-pupil spending; 2) large class sizes, and 3) negative socio-economic conditions like poverty.

But do these factors fully account for the striking differences in performance between some schools? Are California's most-successful schools simply better funded, with smaller classes and a more affluent student body?

Through an analysis of per-pupil spending, class-sizes, and the number of students receiving free or reduced-cost meals (a reliable indicator of student-body affluence) at a cross-section of school districts – followed by a comparison of that data to California’s most recent CELDT and STAR results – this study seeks to answer that question.

This paper is the third in a series about California school districts that have changed their educational approach to place a greater emphasis on early English proficiency.

## The Districts

California's public education system enrolls over six million students in more than 9,000 schools, governed by about 1,000 elected school boards. On average, California's schools spend \$7,523 per pupil, and each classroom houses 27.3 students. Just about one-quarter (24.9 percent) of California's students are English learners, and just over half (51.2 percent) of all students receive free or reduced-cost meals.

This paper focuses on eight districts that represent a cross-section of California's schools:

- 1) Long Beach Unified School District
- 2) Oceanside Unified School District
- 3) San Jose Unified School District
- 4) Orange Unified School District
- 5) Vista Unified School District
- 6) Alum Rock Union Elementary School District
- 7) Atwater Elementary School District
- 8) Los Angeles Unified School District

The two elementary school districts, Alum Rock and Atwater, serve students in grades preK-8. All of the other school districts studied serve students in grades preK-12.

## The Tests

The California English Language Development Test was introduced in 2001 to gauge the English language proficiency of students who speak a foreign language at home. The exam is administered by requirement every academic year. And scores are categorized into five levels - beginning, early intermediate, intermediate, early advanced, and advanced.

In the first year of the exam, only 25 percent of California's English learners scored in the top two categories of proficiency. However, by 2005, 47 percent scored "early advanced" or "advanced" - an improvement of 22 percentage points from 2001.

Meanwhile, by 2005 only 19 percent scored in the bottom two categories, a remarkable improvement from 34 percent in 2001.

### CELDT State Average Results:

2001 - Top Two Categories:	25%
2005 - Top Two Categories:	47%
Net Gain/Loss:	+22

Similar improvements are evidenced by the California Standardized Testing and Reporting Program.

Introduced in 1998, the STAR exam reflects the state's academic content standards plus a nationally-normed, standardized test. And in most districts, English learners who have been reclassified as fluent English proficient (R-FEP) actually outperform the average students in their district. The most recent STAR results were released in August of this year.

On the STAR exam, the figures examined for the purposes of this study involve math and language arts, specifically focusing on English learners who have been reclassified as fluent English proficient. This group was selected because these students represent the best possible outcome for California's English learners. They do not remain in special language programs for English learners nor do they take the CELDT annually.

Reclassification rates - which remained stagnant statewide for the first few years of Proposition 227's implementation, have risen to 9.6 percent statewide for the 2005-2006 school year.

Such rates are an important consideration when comparing the test scores of students who become redesignated as fluent in English. In the case of Long Beach, for example, not only are such students successfully reclassified at a rate well above the state average, but they in turn perform substantially better on the STAR exam than their counterparts statewide.

<b>Percentage of CA English Language Learners Redesignated FEP</b>			
	<b>2005-06</b>	<b>2004-05</b>	<b>2003-04</b>
Long Beach Unified School District	15.2%	18.0%	16.9%
Oceanside Unified School District	6.3%	7.7%	6.4%
San Jose Unified School District	8.2%	7.4%	5.5%
Orange Unified School District	6.8%	5.9%	3.2%
Vista Unified School District	9.0%	9.9%	7.5%
Alum Rock Union Elementary School District	8.8%	6.4%	4.6%
Atwater Elementary School District	8.4%	9.7%	10.9%
Los Angeles Unified School District	9.5%	7.7%	4.2%
<b>California State Totals</b>	<b>9.6%</b>	<b>9.0%</b>	<b>8.3%</b>

On the most recent STAR exam, 50 percent of R-FEP students rated as proficient or advanced on the language arts portion of the test. That's 7 points higher than the state's average for all students. It also represents a 10-point gain from the performance of R-FEP students in 2003.

In math, the results are similar: 63 percent of the state's R-FEP students scored in the top two categories of the STAR exam - a figure that's 13 points higher than the state's average for all students.

STAR State Average Results:

2006 - Top Two Categories (Language Arts, R-FEP):	50%
2003 - Top Two Categories (Language Arts, R-FEP):	40%
2006 - Top Two Categories (Language Arts, All Students):	43%

# Analysis of Student Performance

## *1) Long Beach Unified School District*

Situated just south of Los Angeles, Long Beach Unified is the state's third largest school district, with nearly 95,000 K-12 students in 95 schools. Long Beach claims to be the most diverse large city in the country; its students speak 46 different languages, with Spanish and Khmer the most common. There are around 32,000 English learners in the district.

With spending totaling \$7,503 per pupil (nearly identical to California's state average), Long Beach has a rate of low-income enrollees well above average; 70 percent of all students receive free or discounted meals. Further, the district houses about 29.5 students in each classroom – two full students above the state average.

Long Beach has shifted to a stronger emphasis on teaching English in English as a result of Proposition 227. It emphasizes teaching in English first, with any necessary translation done afterward, not concurrently.

The district developed its own set of quality indicators for English language development classrooms. It uses instructional materials from Hampton-Brown's High Point program that have been aligned with state standards.

### Long Beach Unified School District

English Learners:	34%
Average Class Size:	29.5
Per Pupil Spending:	\$7,503 (99%)
Student Enrollment:	93,589
Free/Reduced Meals:	68.5%

### CELDT

Long Beach Unified's most recent results showed strong improvements, but below the state average. In 2001, only 21 percent of its English learners reached the top two levels of the CELDT. By 2005, 39 percent did (8 points below the state average); an increase of 18 percentage points (4 points behind the state average).

2001 - Top Two Categories:	21%
2005 - Top Two Categories:	39%
Net Gain/Loss:	+18

## STAR

Among former English learners reclassified as English proficient, 50 percent rated as proficient or above in language arts. That's 10 points higher than the district average for all students, and a 6-point gain over 2003. In math, 63 percent of R-FEP students scored in the top two categories of the STAR exam – a figure that is 13 points higher than the district average.

2006 – Top Two Categories (Language Arts, R-FEP):	50%
2003 – Top Two Categories (Language Arts, R-FEP):	44%
2006 – Top Two Categories (Language Arts, All Students):	40%

Perhaps most impressive has been the high rate at which Long Beach Unified has been able to move students to English fluency. Over the past three years, this rate (at 16.9, 18.0 and 15.2 percent respectively) has been close to double the statewide reclassification rate.

## ***2) Oceanside Unified School District***

Oceanside enrolls 22,000 students in 27 different schools about 40 miles north of San Diego. One-fourth (5,594) of Oceanside's students are English learners.

When it comes to spending, class size, and the percentage of students who receive free or discounted meals, Oceanside's figures are nearly identical to California's state average. Per pupil spending totals \$7,638; about half of

### **Oceanside Unified School District**

English Learners:	25%
Average Class Size:	27.5
Per Pupil Spending:	\$7,638 (101%)
Student Enrollment:	22,000
Free/Reduced Meals:	50%

Oceanside's students receive free or discounted meals, and the district houses about 27.5 students in each classroom.

Two years after Proposition 227 became law, its author and most visible proponent, Ron Unz, called Oceanside the school district in California that had done the most to comply with its requirements. "Schools in California and throughout the entire nation should come to Oceanside and learn from its wonderful example, both in English immersion and in other areas as well," Unz said.

Oceanside embraced Structured English Immersion immediately upon the law's passage. "Students are becoming more comfortable with English, especially the younger ones," the district's director of curriculum and instruction told the *Los Angeles Times* in February of 1999. Oceanside's English learners showed major improvements of 19 percentage points in English fluency on the STAR test in 1999 and 2000 – well above the state average.

### CELDT

When compared to the state as a whole, Oceanside's progress has lagged behind since then. In 2001, the district mirrored the state average for all students, with 24 percent of Oceanside's English learners scoring in the top two proficiency categories. Last year, 43 percent did (4 points below the state average), an increase of 19 percentage points (3 points behind the state average).

2001 - Top Two Categories:	24%
2005 - Top Two Categories:	43%
Net Gain/Loss:	+19

### STAR

Among R-FEP students, 48 percent rated as proficient or above in language arts. That's 7 points higher than the district average, and an 11-point gain from 2003. In math, 65 percent of R-FEP students scored in the top two categories of the STAR exam – a figure that is 12 points higher than the district average.

2006 - Top Two Categories (Language Arts, R-FEP):	48%
2003 - Top Two Categories (Language Arts, R-FEP):	37%
2006 - Top Two Categories (Language Arts, All Students):	41%

## **3) San Jose Unified School District**

Of the 31,646 students enrolled in San Jose USD's 52 schools, some 8,017 (25.3 percent) of them are English learners. According to conventional wisdom, San Jose Unified should be well ahead of the curve. With per pupil spending totaling \$8,271, the district spends nearly 10 percent more than the state average. The average class size is 23.7, about four fewer students in each classroom than the average California school. Further, with only 42.4 percent of its students receiving free or reduced-cost meals, San Jose Unified has fewer low-income students than the average California district.

San Jose has also been the school district that has most fervently resisted Proposition 227 since it became law. It challenged the provision in federal court

shortly after the law passed, and won court approval to continue teaching Spanish-speaking students in Spanish. The case hinged on a 1985 court order that governed the district's schools. As a result, San Jose became known as the only school district in the state to be legally exempted from Proposition 227.

In late 1998, the district applied for – and received – waivers allowing them to keep over 2,800 children (56 percent of students) in the same bilingual education classrooms they were in before the law passed. The court order governed only Spanish-speaking students.

As a result of these and perhaps other factors, San Jose's English learners trailed behind state averages on standardized tests between 1998 and 2000. The test scores were not uniform, however. At Horace Mann Elementary school, for instance, STAR reading scores jumped from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 35<sup>th</sup> percentile over that period. School officials credited special programs at the school, such as a daily hour of English-language development and an intensive reading program, for the progress.

<b><u>San Jose Unified School District</u></b>	
English Learners:	25.3%
Average Class Size:	23.7
Per Pupil Spending:	\$8,271 (109%)
Student Enrollment:	31,646
Free/Reduced Meals:	42.4%

The rate at which English learners scored in the top two proficiency levels on CELDT grew steadily from 2001-2005, but at rates lower than state averages.

More recently, reclassification rates for students successfully becoming fluent in English has become a stated goal of district leaders. Students now receive official certificates and are recognized in schoolwide assemblies. And they have finally begun to improve – from 5.5 percent in 2003-04 to 8.2 percent in 2005-06. But they are still holding back state averages.

### CELDT

San Jose Unified's CELDT progress has lagged behind. In 2001, the district mirrored the state average, with 24 percent of San Jose's English learners scoring in the "advanced" or "early advanced" categories on the CELDT. Last year, only 44 percent of its English learners scored in the top two categories (3 points below the state average); an increase of 20 percentage points (2 points behind the state average).

2001 - Top Two Categories:	24%
2005 - Top Two Categories:	44%
Net Gain/Loss:	+20

STAR

Among students reclassified as fluent in English, 55 percent rated as proficient or above in language arts. That’s 8 points higher than the district average, and a 4-point gain from 2003. In math, 67 percent of R-FEP students scored in the top two categories of the STAR exam - a figure that is 12 points higher than the district average.

2006 - Top Two Categories (Language Arts, R-FEP):	55%
2003 - Top Two Categories (Language Arts, R-FEP):	51%
2006 - Top Two Categories (Language Arts, All Students):	47%

San Jose Unified enjoys a relatively advantageous position with respect to state averages in several areas. Its per-pupil spending significantly exceeds the average, the district houses about four fewer students in each classroom, its percentage of English learners mirrors California’s state average, and the district has fewer low-income students than the average California school.

Despite these factors, San Jose’s test results are relatively unimpressive. Last year, only 44 percent of its English learners scored in the top two proficiency categories on the CELDT exam - 3 points below the state average. Further, the district’s percentage of English learners scoring in the top two categories of language proficiency increased by only 20 percentage points over the past four years.

Similarly, on the STAR exam, the progress of the district’s R-FEP students on the language arts exam came in significantly behind the state average, despite having high test scores.

#### 4) Orange Unified School District

Located near Disneyland in Southern California, Orange Unified enrolls nearly 31,000 K-12 students in 42 schools. Of these students, 6,655 are categorized as English learners.

In 1997 – nearly a full year before California voters passed Proposition 227 – the district successfully petitioned the California State Board of Education for permission to eliminate its bilingual education program and replace it with Structured

English Immersion. As such, Orange was the first California district to formally implement language immersion into its curriculum.

#### Orange Unified School District

English Learners:	21.5%
Average Class Size:	29.3
Per Pupil Spending:	\$7,201 (95%)
Student Enrollment:	30,901
Free/Reduced Meals:	33.7%

#### CELDT

On the most-recent CELDT exam, Orange Unified scored slightly better than the state average – but the district started out there, as well. Further, the district’s progress has lagged behind the state average. In 2001, 30 percent of its English learners reached the top two levels of the CELDT. By 2005, 49 percent did (2 points above the state average); an increase of 19 percentage points (3 points behind the state average).

2001 – Top Two Categories:	30%
2005 – Top Two Categories:	49%
Net Gain/Loss:	+19

#### STAR

Among R-FEP students, 60 percent rated as proficient or above in language arts. That’s 8 points higher than the district average, and an 11-point gain from 2003. In math, 63 percent of R-FEP students scored in the top two categories of the STAR exam – a figure that is 9 points higher than the district average.

2006 – Top Two Categories (Language Arts, R-FEP):	60%
2003 – Top Two Categories (Language Arts, R-FEP):	49%
2006 – Top Two Categories (Language Arts, All Students):	52%

Orange Unified enrolls fewer low-income students than the average California district, but per-pupil spending lags behind the state average and classrooms house more students than the typical California class. And even though the

district's growth in CELDT scores has lagged behind the state's, Orange Unified's English learners have consistently scored higher on the CELDT than the average California district. Just last year, 49 percent of the district's English learners scored in the "advanced" or "early advanced" categories.

On the most recent STAR exam, Orange Unified did well. On the language arts test, the progress of the district's R-FEP students slightly surpassed the state average. Further, 60 percent of the district's R-FEP students scored in the top two categories of the language arts exam, a full 10 points higher than the state average.

### 5) Vista Unified School District

Located in northern San Diego County, Vista Unified enrolls more than 26,000 students in 28 schools. Of those students, just over one-quarter (6,745) are English learners.

The district houses about 21.5 students in each classroom – significantly fewer than the state average. Just more than 40 percent of the school system's students receive free or reduced-cost meals. The district's per pupil spending is nearly identical to the state average, totaling \$7,630.

Like San Jose Unified, Vista's policies and leadership were very pro-bilingual education when Proposition 227 became law. As a school district it was slow to embrace Structured English Immersion. As a result, between 1998 and 2000 the district's English learners

scored below the state average on the STAR exam. But Vista's leadership has largely come around to accept a new instructional focus on Structured English Immersion, and the academic results are beginning to benefit from the shift.

<b><u>Vista Unified School District</u></b>	
English Learners:	25.7%
Average Class Size:	21.5
Per Pupil Spending:	\$7,630 (101%)
Student Enrollment:	26,207
Free/Reduced Meals:	42.4%

#### CELDT

In Vista, the school district's most recent results came in significantly lower than the state average. But the district started out way behind – and its gains have been slightly above average. In 2001, only 17 percent of Vista's English learners scored in the top two proficiency categories. Last year, 40 percent did (7 points

below the state average); an increase of 23 percentage points (1 point above the state average).

2001 - Top Two Categories:	17%
2005 - Top Two Categories:	40%
Net Gain/Loss:	+23

### STAR

Among R-FEP students, 41 percent rated as proficient or above in Language Arts. That's one point lower than the district average, and a 12-point gain from 2003. In math, 62 percent of R-FEP students scored in the top two categories of the STAR exam - a figure that is 11 points higher than the district average.

2006 - Top Two Categories (Language Arts, R-FEP):	41%
2003 - Top Two Categories (Language Arts, R-FEP):	29%
2006 - Top Two Categories (Language Arts, All Students):	42%

Vista Unified has a per-pupil spending rate that mirrors the state average, a slightly lower percentage of low income students and fewer students in each classroom for every teacher. Many observers would suggest that this places the district in an advantageous position to make better-than-average gains.

Nonetheless, on the most recent CELDT, the district's English learners lagged behind the majority of their counterparts. And in terms of CELDT progress, Vista Unified has advanced by about as much as the average California district.

The STAR results were quite similar. On language arts, although the progress of the district's R-FEP students slightly surpassed the state average, only 41 percent of those students rated in the top two categories of the exam - a full nine points behind the state average.

## ***6) Alum Rock Union Elementary School District***

Spanning kindergarten through eighth grade, Alum Rock is located on the east side of San Jose, California. Enrolling 13,515 students in 27 schools, nearly 56 percent (7,677) of the district's students are English learners.

One of California's poorest school districts, all but 36 of the school system's students receive free or reduced-cost meals. With Alum Rock Union's spending at \$7,666 per pupil, the district's per student expenditure is nearly identical to California's state average.

In the first years under Proposition 227, Alum Rock largely followed its neighbor San Jose as a remaining bastion where bilingual education continued to thrive. In late 1998, the district applied for – and received – waivers that allowed schools to keep more than 3,000

**Alum Rock Union Elementary School District**

English Learners:	56.8%
Average Class Size:	26.2
Per Pupil Spending:	\$7,666 (104%)
Student Enrollment:	13,515
Free/Reduced Meals:	99.7%

students (nearly 70 percent) in the same bilingual education classrooms they were in before the law was passed. As a result, the district’s rate at which English learners were reclassified as proficient in English remained one of the lowest in the state (4.6 percent in 2003-04).

But the school district has increased its emphasis on teaching English to some degree. In 2005-06 its reclassification rate for English learners had increased to 8.8 percent, or within a percentage point of the state average.

**CELDT**

The performance of Alum Rock Union Elementary School District mimicked that of Vista Unified. In 2001, the district came in slightly below the state average – and remained below average this year, as well. But the gains of the district’s English learners have been strong. In 2001, just 22 percent of the district’s English learners scored in the “advanced” or “early advanced” categories on the CELDT. Last year, 45 percent of Alum Rock’s English learners scored in the top two categories (2 points below the state average), reflecting a gain of 23 percentage points (1 point above the state average).

2001 - Top Two Categories:	22%
2005 - Top Two Categories:	45%
Net Gain/Loss:	+23

**STAR**

Among English R-FEP students, 75 percent rated as proficient or above in Language Arts. That’s 43 points higher than the district average, and an 8-point gain from 2003. In math, 77 percent of R-FEP students scored in the top two categories of the STAR exam – a figure that is 38 points higher than the district average.

2006 - Top Two Categories (Language Arts, R-FEP):	75%
2003 - Top Two Categories (Language Arts, R-FEP):	67%
2006 - Top Two Categories (Language Arts, All Students):	32%

In regards to progress, the performance of Alum Rock Union Elementary School District mimicked that of Vista Unified since 2001 - the percentage of English learners scoring in the top two categories on the CELDT has risen by 23 points, outpacing the state average.

Further, with 75 percent of the district's R-FEP scoring in the top two categories of the language arts exam, its STAR results are impressive. Because Alum Rock serves only students through the eighth grade and not high school students, however, its districtwide test score averages for English learners are higher than those that include students in grades 9-12.

It is also important to note the demographics of Alum Rock's student population - 99.7 percent of the district's students receive free or reduced-cost meals. The district's average class size is 26.2 - only about one student smaller than California's average classroom - and per pupil spending is only a bit higher than California's state average.

### ***7) Atwater Elementary School District***

Situated 80 miles east of San Francisco between Fresno and Sacramento, Atwater Elementary School District enrolls 4,692 K-8 students in 9 schools. Of those students, 1,740 (37.1 %) are categorized as English learners.

For much of the late-1990s, Atwater operated under a U.S. Office for Civil Rights monitoring arrangement that mandated increased primary language instruction, including the hiring of an additional 30 bilingual teachers. After the passage of Proposition 227, the district was able to dismantle this program and join the rest of California in pursuing English immersion.

The policy the school district adopted called for English to be the primary language of instruction, as well as for giving directions and other tasks. Children's non-English native language was

<b><u>Atwater Elementary School District</u></b>	
English Learners:	37.1%
Average Class Size:	25.1
Per Pupil Spending:	\$6,992 (95%)
Student Enrollment:	4,692
Free/Reduced Meals:	74.7%

to be used only for emergencies, clarification or explanation.

Spanning kindergarten through eighth grade, the district houses about 25.1 students in each classroom, more than two students fewer than the state average. A low-income district, nearly three out of every four students receives a free or reduced-cost meal. As for spending, the district's per pupil spending totals \$6,992, which is about 5 percent below the state average.

### CELDT

Even though Atwater Elementary School District still scores slightly below California's state average, the school district's recent progress has been impressive. In 2001, just 14 percent of Atwater's English learners scored in the top two proficiency categories on the CELDT. Last year, that figure climbed by 31 percentage points (9 points above the state average), with 45 percent of the district's English learners winding up in the top two categories (2 points below the state average).

2001 - Top Two Categories:	14%
2005 - Top Two Categories:	45%
Net Gain/Loss:	+31

### STAR

Among R-FEP students, 40 percent rated as proficient or above in English. That's six points higher than the district average, and a five-point gain from 2003. In math, 67 percent R-FEP students scored in the top two categories of the STAR exam - a figure that is 23 points higher than the district average.

2006 - Top Two Categories (Language Arts, R-FEP):	40%
2003 - Top Two Categories (Language Arts, R-FEP):	35%
2006 - Top Two Categories (Language Arts, All Students):	34%

Although the district's STAR results are bit behind the state average, the overall success of Atwater Elementary School District challenges conventional wisdom. The district spends less per pupil than the average California district, and teaches a greater percentage of students who receive free or reduced cost meals. As a whole, the district's class sizes are a bit smaller than the average California classroom. Its progress has been a true education success story. In 2001, only 14 percent of Atwater's English learners scored in the top two proficiency categories on the CELDT. And last year, that figure climbed by 31 percentage points.

Like Alum Rock Union, it should be noted that Atwater Elementary School District spans only kindergarten through eighth grade. Because English learners

generally test better at younger grades, it follows that expectations for Atwater should be higher.

### 8) *Los Angeles Unified School District*

Los Angeles Unified is California’s largest school system. The total K-12 enrollment of its 858 schools is 727,319, with English learners constituting more than 40 percent of that number (293,566). Spanish speakers make up the largest part of that population, followed by Armenian and Korean speakers. All in all, 35 different languages are spoken in the district.

Los Angeles Unified School District spends \$8,790 per pupil (significantly more than the state average), and houses about 27.7 students in each classroom (just slightly above the state average). More than three-quarters of the district’s students receive free or reduced-cost meals, well above the California average.

The school district challenged Proposition 227 in court in the weeks following its approval, in an attempt to delay its compliance and to preserve its bilingual education programs. It was also the subject of another lawsuit filed by the Mexican Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) with the same intent.

These lawsuits contributed to delays in the Los Angeles schools making policy changes necessary for compliance with Proposition 227. The changes varied from school to school in some cases.

<b><u>Los Angeles Unified School District</u></b>	
English Learners:	40%
Average Class Size:	27.7
Per Pupil Spending:	\$8,790 (116%)
Student Enrollment:	727.319
Free/Reduced Meals:	77%

“In my opinion, our students are learning academic English faster than expected,” Jesus Romero, a bilingual education coordinator in the district’s South-Central neighborhood told *The Los Angeles Times* in February of 1999. Meanwhile, at the Logan Street School near Dodger Stadium, administrators sought and received waivers to keep 250 students, or two-thirds of English language learners, in the same bilingual education classes they had been before Proposition 227 became law.

As late as 2001, some of the district's schools were still clinging to old bilingual education practices, and its English learners substantially trailed their peers statewide on standardized tests.

But since then, Los Angeles has made substantial changes to emphasize early English learning with an emphasis on instruction in English. Its English learners have responded with substantial improvements of their own on standardized tests.

### CELDT

Los Angeles Unified's gains on CELDT were the strongest of the districts studied. In 2001, only 17 percent of English learners in the state's largest district scored in the top two categories of the CELDT, 8 points below the state average at the time. In 2005, the district surpassed the state average by 2 points, with 49 percent of its English learners scoring in the top two categories; an increase of 32 percentage points (10 points above the state average).

2001 - Top Two Categories:	17%
2005 - Top Two Categories:	49%
Net Gain/Loss:	+32

### STAR

Among R-FEP students, 39 percent rated as proficient or above in English. That's 10 points higher than the district average, and a 10-point gain from 2003. In math, 54 percent R-FEP students scored in the top two categories of the STAR exam - a figure that is 13 points higher than the district average.

2006 - Top Two Categories (Language Arts, R-FEP):	39%
2003 - Top Two Categories (Language Arts, R-FEP):	29%
2006 - Top Two Categories (Language Arts, All Students):	29%

The success of English learners in the Los Angeles Unified School District defies the conventional myths of education reform. Although the district spends more per pupil than the average California district, Los Angeles Unified houses more students in each classroom than the average California school, and more than three out of every four students receives free or reduced-cost meals.

Over the past four years, the percentage of English learners scoring in the top two categories on the CELDT has risen by an astounding 32 points. And on the STAR exam, the language arts progress of Los Angeles Unified's R-FEP students has mirrored the state average.

## Conclusion

When it comes to the success of California's English language learners, what are the factors that have had a significant impact on test scores?

The evidence suggests that factors like poverty, per-pupil expenditures and class size have not. In fact, these factors ultimately were not strong predictors in the academic performance of the eight districts studied.

Ultimately, Structured English Immersion doesn't cost more money, require smaller classrooms, or necessitate a more affluent student body. It simply embraces an emphasis on learning English *through* English – in the early years of a child's schooling. That's why some schools such as those discussed here – regardless of some shortfalls in spending, class sizes, or demographics – succeed remarkably. And it's why others continue to fail.

CELDT or STAR scores, or growth, are poor indicators of whether or not a school is underfunded or understaffed. Just compare the above-average test scores for English learners in Los Angeles Unified to those in San Jose that have held back state averages since 1998.

Los Angeles Unified School District houses *more* students in each classroom than the average California school, and its success with English learners has been dramatic. Its gains on CELDT were the strongest of the districts studied: the percentage of English learners scoring in the top two categories on the CELDT has risen by an astounding 32 points over the past four years. The district may not present a model for full compliance with Proposition 227, but its new emphasis on early English acquisition has shown impressive gains.

San Jose Unified, on the other hand, enjoys relative advantages over state averages in terms of class size, per-pupil spending and rate of students eligible for free or reduced meals. And the performance of its English learners has repeatedly held back state averages.

Do certain factors beyond a school's control – like poverty – affect a student's ability to learn? Of course. But growing up poor doesn't create an intransient situation; schools are not helpless. In districts like Atwater and Alum Rock, for example, it's evident that some schools are able to overcome challenges dictated by economic disadvantage to produce impressive results for English learners.

When it comes to class size, does the number of students in a classroom matter? Once again, yes, it certainly can be a factor. But as the above comparison of the Los Angeles and the San Jose school districts shows, even though the Los

Angeles schools average four more students per classroom, they achieve superior results for English fluency.

Structured English Immersion came about in California following its overwhelming approval by voters statewide in 1998. By all accounts the law has been unevenly applied. But standardized test scores have demonstrated that by focusing on early acquisition of English, these old excuses for poor results can be overcome. And increasingly that is happening across California.