

# PROMISE RESEARCH MONOGRAPH

## Executive Summary

By

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### ***The PROMISE Initiative***

The PROMISE Research Monograph presents the findings and conclusions from four studies focusing upon the development and implementation of a systemic reform model, focused on English Learners (ELs), for preschool through twelfth grade students in six southern California counties (Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, and Ventura). The PROMISE Initiative proposed a bold research-based shift in how programs are designed and delivered to ELs, and advocated a critical research-based vision that ensures that ELs achieve and sustain high levels of proficiency and literacy in English and the home language, high levels of academic achievement, sophisticated sociocultural and multicultural competency, and are prepared for successful transition to higher education, successful preparation as a 21<sup>st</sup> century global citizen, and reach high levels of motivation, confidence, and self-assurance.

The core of this systemic transformation model is a vision- and principles-based reform providing an infrastructure of support for schools and districts to put into practice “what works” to meet the needs of ELs. This reform model promoted the customization and operationalization of eight research-based PROMISE Core Principles (as listed and described below) through a facilitated process of “co-design” leading school sites to a specific action plan to meet the needs of EL students:

- **ENRICHED AND AFFIRMING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS** – Create a safe, affirming, and enriched environment for participatory & inclusive learning.
- **EMPOWERING PEDAGOGY** – Use culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy that maximizes learning, actively accesses and develops student voice, and provides opportunities for leadership.
- **CHALLENGING AND RELEVANT CURRICULUM** – Engage English Learners in well-articulated and age-appropriate curriculum that purposefully builds bilingualism, biliteracy, and multiculturalism. This curriculum is cognitively complex, coherent, relevant, and challenging.
- **HIGH QUALITY INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES** – Provide and utilize high quality standards-aligned instructional resources that provide equitable access to core curriculum and academic language in the classroom, school, and community.

- **VALID AND COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT** – Build and implement valid and comprehensive assessment systems designed to promote reflective practice and data-driven planning.
- **HIGH QUALITY PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION & SUPPORT** – Provide coherent, comprehensive, and ongoing professional preparation and support programs based on well-defined standards of practice - designed to create professional learning communities of administrators, teachers, and other staff to implement the PROMISE vision of excellent teaching for ELs.
- **POWERFUL FAMILY/COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT** – Implement strong family and community engagement programs that build leadership capacity and value and draw upon community funds of knowledge to inform, support, and enhance teaching and learning for ELs.
- **ADVOCACY-ORIENTED ADMINISTRATIVE/LEADERSHIP SYSTEMS** – Provide advocacy-oriented administration and leadership that institute system-wide mechanisms to focus all stakeholders on the diverse needs and assets of ELs. These systems structure, organize, coordinate, and integrate programs and services to respond systemically to EL needs.

In the PROMISE model, schools are supported to implement their Plans through a collaborative infrastructure of support, professional development and technical assistance provided by county offices of education and PROMISE partner organizations, and engagement in professional networks.

### ***The PROMISE Initiative Pilot Study***

The PROMISE three-year pilot study was conducted from January 2006 through June 2009. The fifteen schools that participated represented all grade spans (two preschool, five elementary, four middle school, four high school) and varying contexts (rural, suburban, and urban-suburban) serving a range of numbers and concentrations of Spanish-speaking ELs. First, it is important to recognize that PROMISE sites, in comparison to the district, county, and state averages, had far more EL, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students and students whose parents had a high school education or less.

From its inception, a PROMISE research component was designed to contribute to the educational research of ELs and school reform, as well as to refine the model. This research component was framed around four areas of inquiry:

- What is the PROMISE model, and what has occurred in school practices, policies, and structures as a result of implementation of the PROMISE model? (*ethnographic study*)

- What has occurred in classroom practices as a result of engagement in the PROMISE model? (*quantitative and qualitative methodologies*)
- What knowledge skills and expertise did PROMISE site principals have and need to effectively lead the implementation of the PROMISE model? (*quantitative and qualitative methodologies*)
- What was the impact of PROMISE on student learning and participation? (*analysis of student achievement and demographic data*)

### ***Cross-Research Findings from the PROMISE Initiative Research***

Across the four research studies, the PROMISE Initiative was found to be a systemic school reform model with demonstrated power to produce significant research-based change at all grade spans. The PROMISE pilot was just three-years, a short time-frame for initiating and supporting meaningful change with impacts on student achievement. The research effort documented that much was accomplished within that short frame.

#### ***Impacts on Schools***

In most PROMISE schools:

- Instruction, curriculum and program design became more aligned with the research on effective practices for English Learners.
- There was an increase in the use of higher quality classroom practices from the beginning to the end of PROMISE.
- Parent engagement increased.
- Programs were strengthened to become more consistent and better articulated across classrooms and grade levels.
- Programs were strengthened and new approaches instituted to enhance language and literacy in two languages. Analysis of student achievement data demonstrated that consistent and articulated biliteracy models have the power to improve student outcomes.

The PROMISE model demonstrated applicability to varying contexts, with a flexibility that enabled schools in differing communities and at different grade levels to focus upon the particular needs of their students and the specific structural and climate issues of their school.

#### ***Impacts on Students:***

As a result of PROMISE implementation, student achievement increased. There was evidence of significant gains in student achievement *and* a narrowing of the achievement gap between PROMISE district averages and the State average – made more remarkable because the ELs in the schools served by the PROMISE Initiative are students with greater risk-conditions than ELs overall in the state. PROMISE elementary and middle school students made excellent gains across the duration of the PROMISE Initiative and narrowed the gap between the

PROMISE average and the State average in English language proficiency, English language arts and math achievement. Over the duration of the PROMISE Initiative, students at most grade levels were more likely to be Proficient/Advanced and Basic+ (scoring at Basic or above) in AY 2009 than 2008 and more in 2008 than in 2007. This trend was noted for all PROMISE students, Hispanic students, students with disabilities, and students at all risk factors.

### ***Impacts on Leadership:***

Principals at all levels found that the PROMISE vision, Core Principles and participation in the Initiative helped them redefine the school vision, develop stronger plans for EL success, and build more distributive leadership across the school. They reported that the codesign process provided important facilitation and support to create collaborative systems and “ownership” of English Learners school-wide. Teacher leaders emerged through the PROMISE Lead Team mechanisms. The PROMISE Initiative helped educators deal with the challenges in implementing research-based EL approaches in the context of the current accountability system.

### ***Implications***

The research analysis suggests implications for school improvement and other efforts designed to strengthen English Learner programs and outcomes.

- Schools seeking to improve English Learner achievement need to be supported by an infrastructure of support that is infused with EL expertise. General expertise in good educational practices is not sufficient.
- The research base on effective practices for English Learners is not adequately known in the field. Educational leaders, policy makers and researchers should create partnerships to collaboratively develop and disseminate models and approaches to support districts and school sites in implementing strategies that improve English Learner success. Investment in the development and dissemination of clear research-based models for preschool education that promote later school success with dual language learners is particularly needed.
- To promote academic success for EL, districts should offer high-quality, well articulated primary language programs for their ELs. Models that result in proficiency in two or more languages and that establish language diversity as an asset should be clearly distinguished from other approaches that do not have these benefits.
- Districts and sites could benefit by engaging in networks and professional learning communities around specific issues connected to EL achievement. These can be supported by researcher-educator collaboratives at regional or district levels, and should include facilitated support for engaging with research, conducting inquiries, sharing practices and reflection.

- Long-term and in-depth professional development and leadership development are necessary for English Learner success. Leaders should provide all teachers (academic content, elective and language teachers) with in-depth training on student engagement strategies, academic language development, and techniques for differentiating instruction for all learners. Professional development should provide support for enhancing and integrating EL instructional strategies and materials with mandated curriculum and supplementing instruction as needed beyond what is cited in prescriptive programs. Coaching and mentoring should be provided to support the implementation of these strategies.

\* There is no one-size-fits-all model for English Learners that is appropriate across all schools and communities. School leaders need support in order to determine the most appropriate strategies to implement for their students, in their site. It is important for schools to begin reform efforts with a diagnosis of the specific challenges facing their students, and the specific capacity and structural issues that facilitate or impede meeting the needs of those students. School leaders need to know where they're starting from and chart their course accordingly. They need data and inquiry approaches to know the diversity and profile of their EL population. A principles-based framework can guide actions towards a cohesive and comprehensive response to the needs of ELs. Access to research and researchers will assist in the selection of appropriate strategies. Technical assistance, facilitation, formalized steps and tools can be provided to site leaders to help put together the information needed to create the programs that will be most effective for their sites.

Finally, an implication drawn from the research on the PROMISE pilot is that in order to mount and sustain effective schools for EL, schools need the kind of frameworks and support provided through PROMISE. These are needed not only to help initiate changes, but also to support schools to continue to refine their practices and programs, and to make them more systemic. In this sense, perhaps the PROMISE model might be viewed not only as a school CHANGE model, but rather as a template for how schools, districts and counties might regularly collaborate in a school system designed for continual improvement.

*For more information:*  
[www.promise-initiative.org](http://www.promise-initiative.org)

## **The PROMISE MODEL**

The PROMISE model for comprehensive school reform and EL success is based on research on effective practices for ELs *and* the research on effective school improvement strategies. It has five foundational elements:

- A research-derived and values-driven **vision** of student success that is the core of the PROMISE outcome-based reform.
- A set of eight inter-related and research-based **core principles** that frame and provide cohesion for the work of schools to improve outcomes for ELs
- A process of **co-design** and reflective practice through which schools develop and continuously refine customized Plans for improvement, deepening and strengthening their work in the process
- An **infrastructure of leadership and support** for implementing the school reform effort
- The recruitment and engagement of PROMISE school sites and districts in a **three-year professional community and network** with other schools and districts making-meaning of and implementing the PROMISE model

The components fit together in a theory of change that can be depicted as follows:

### ***The PROMISE Theory of Change***



