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Ed Trust–West Releases Report On Using Science To Advance English Learner Equity In California Schools

OAKLAND, CA (January 12, 2017) – While English learners face significant achievement gaps in science, some California districts are accelerating their success by utilizing innovative practices that fuse together language development and science instruction, a new report from The Education Trust–West reveals.

The report, entitled “Unlocking Learning: Science As A Lever For English Learner Equity”, highlights California’s severe achievement gap in science between fluent English speakers and ‘English learners’ – a disparity wider than gap between racial groups and by economic status. The report emphasizes the overwhelming benefits of prioritizing science education for English learners and puts forth a blueprint for how California can do this most effectively.

“It’s time to eradicate the notion that science education and English learning should be mutually exclusive. Too often, California’s English learners are receiving additional English instruction only at the expense of science education, and the consequences are profound,” said Ryan J. Smith, Executive Director of Ed Trust–West. “In this report, we see examples of California classrooms where effective and equitable integration of science with language development is dramatically increasing academic achievement for English learners.”

Additionally, the report investigates innovative approaches various schools and districts are implementing that are successfully leveraging science to advance achievement levels for English learners. Districts featured in the report range from rural to urban settings, including Calipatria Unified School District, Imperial Unified School District, Oak Grove School District, Oakland Unified School District, San Francisco Unified School District, and Westminster School District. These programs were guided by new standards that will soon go into effect statewide, presenting districts with a crucial opportunity to make positive reforms. Based on an in-depth analysis of what has worked well in those schools, as well as an evaluation of the challenges schools face, the report offers specific policy recommendations at both the district and state level for how best to integrate science education and English language development and unlock the potential of California’s English learners.

Key report takeaways:

- Many of California’s 1.37 million English learners don’t even have access to rigorous and/or advanced science courses, let alone being equipped with the tools to thrive in them.
- Research shows that weaving together science and language development can increase students’ academic performance in reading, writing, and science simultaneously.
- In schools and districts taking an innovative approach to combined English language and science instruction through NGSS, some promising practices are resulting in achievement levels that are double and even triple the state average for English learners who met or exceeded proficiency.
- With new state education standards and a redesigned funding system, districts have an opportunity to overhaul their approach to science education and language development informed by best practices from schools featured in this report.