



FOUNDATION *for*  
CHILD DEVELOPMENT

## **Who's Left Behind?**

# **Immigrant Children in High- and Low-LEP Schools**

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**T**his presentation includes some preliminary findings and observations from a multi-year study of the No Child Left Behind Act and its implications for elementary and secondary students from immigrant families and with limited English skills. The study began in Fall 2004 and has been funded primarily by the Foundation for Child Development, with additional support provided by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Given during a breakfast briefing at the Migration Policy Institute in Washington, D.C., on September 30, 2005, this presentation marked the public release of *Who's Left Behind?: Immigrant Children in High and Low LEP Schools*, by Clemencia Cosentino de Cohen, Nicole Deterding, and Beatriz Chu Clewell.



## Who's Left Behind?

### Goals of the Project

- Study characteristics of schools with varying concentrations of LEP\* students
- High-, Low- and No-LEP Schools

The main goal of this project was to study the characteristics of schools serving immigrant children at the time of NCLB's passage.

We used data collected in the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). As SASS lacks a measure of immigration status among school children, this analysis uses English language proficiency level (or LEP status) as a proxy for immigrant status, recognizing that some LEP students may be neither immigrants nor their first-generation children, but rather second- or third-generation U.S.-born children.

Focusing on nationally-representative information about elementary schools, principals, and teachers, the study compares schools with high proportions of LEP students and schools with fewer and no such students to examine potential differences among the schools educating the nation's young.

The analyses yielded many important findings, which are presented in detail in the full report.

This presentation summarizes three key findings:

- The concentration of LEP students in relatively few schools.
- The convergence of "high risk" factors in schools with large proportions of LEP students.
- The resources available at schools that serve LEP and immigrant students.

\* Limited English Proficient



## Methodology

### **SASS 1999-2000 Survey (nationally representative)**

#### **Public Elementary Schools**

Step 1: Study LEP concentration in schools

Step 2: Divide schools by LEP concentration (High, Low, No)

Step 3: Study characteristics of schools by LEP concentration type

The data reported here come from the 1999–2000 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). SASS is the most comprehensive survey of elementary and secondary schools, school administrators, and teachers available. This data set allows us to produce nationally-representative estimates. Because this work focuses on public elementary schools, analyses were restricted to public schools generally serving students in pre-K to grade 5.

#### Definitions

Public elementary schools were categorized according to the percentage of their students identified as limited English proficient (LEP). The first step in determining category cutoffs was to examine the distribution of LEP students in elementary schools. We then used this information to create a typology of elementary schools according to LEP student enrollment: High-LEP, Low-LEP, and No-LEP schools.

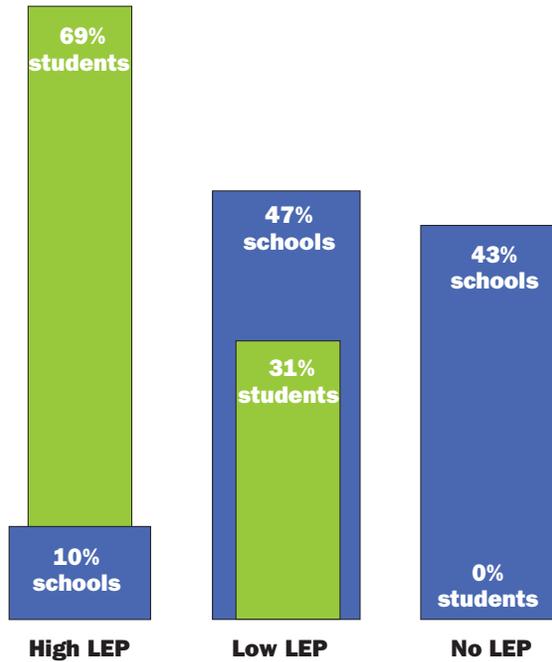
“High-LEP” schools were defined as the top 10 percent of elementary schools in terms of LEP enrollment, representing the approximately 5,000 elementary schools where LEP students account for about 25 percent or more of all students enrolled. “Low-LEP” schools were defined as those where LEP students represent less than a quarter of all students, and include close to 24,000 schools (47 percent of all elementary schools). “No-LEP” schools are those that report enrolling no students who are limited English proficient, and add up to about 21,000 schools (43 percent of all elementary schools).

The study consisted of examining school, teacher, and principal characteristics across these three main categories.



## Concentration

**Concentration of LEP students in elementary schools**



A major finding of this research is the high concentration of children who are limited English proficient in relatively few schools. As this graph shows, the majority of LEP students attend a small number of schools: Nearly 70 percent of LEP students nationally are enrolled in only 10 percent of elementary schools.

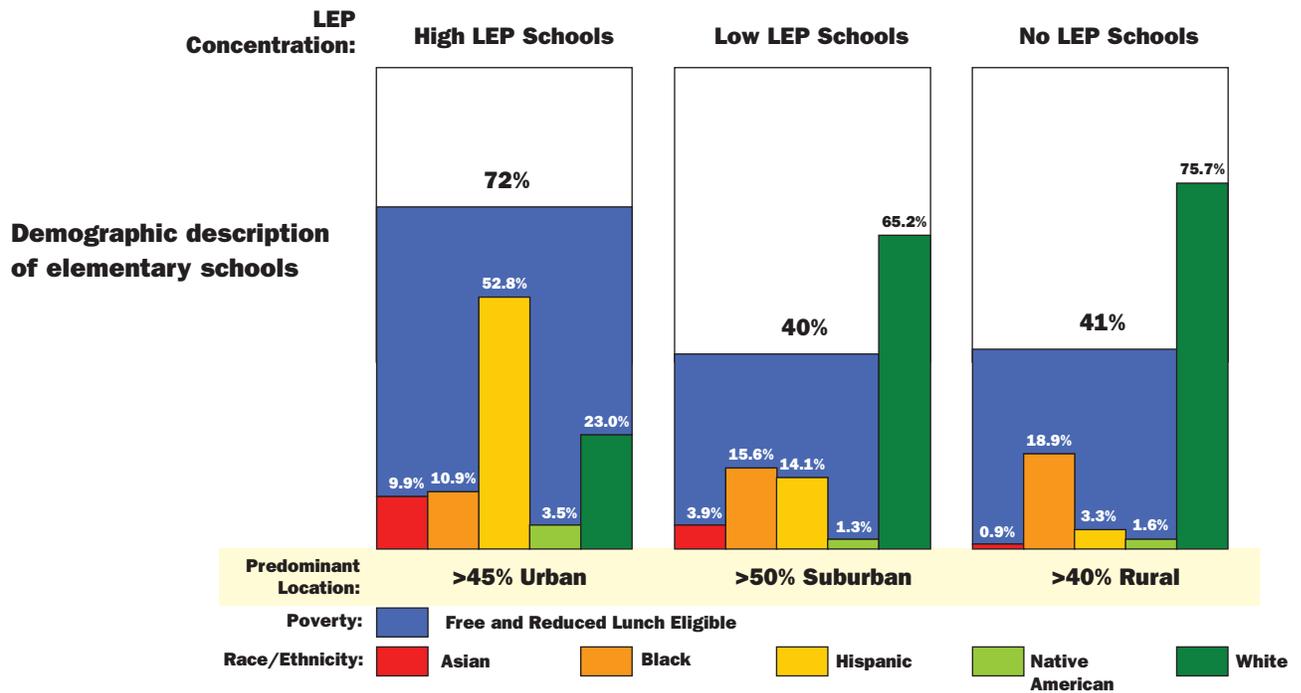
In these schools, that we again call “High-LEP,” LEP students account for almost one half of the student body (on average), a striking contrast to the 5 percent of LEP students enrolled in the average Low-LEP school.

Low-LEP schools serve the remaining 30% of LEP students.

These findings suggest that the majority of ELL students are segregated in schools serving primarily ELL and immigrant children. As further testament to the segregation of LEP students, nearly half of elementary schools in the United States serve no limited English proficient students.



## Convergence



This graph shows the characteristics or factors associated with different types of schools, and how these factors converge to form models of educational conditions prevalent in these three types of elementary schools.

**Ethnicity.** High-LEP and No-LEP schools have almost perfectly identical, but inverse, distributions of student enrollment by race. At High-LEP schools, minority students account for 77 percent of the student body, and White students for the remainder. The opposite is true at No-LEP schools, where White students make up 76 percent of the student body. Low-LEP schools are more balanced, but still predominantly White.

**Poverty.** The percentage of poor children, as represented by the share qualifying for free and/or reduced-price school lunches, is significantly higher in High-LEP schools (72 percent) than in either Low- or No-LEP schools (about 40 percent).

**Location.** High-LEP schools are more likely to be in urban areas than the other school types; about 46 percent of High-LEP schools are in urban settings, versus about 24 percent of the Low- and No-LEP schools. Low-LEP schools, on the other hand, are more apt to be in suburban areas, while No-LEP schools are more often found in rural parts of the country.

These findings suggest that High-, Low- and No-LEP schools differ not only in terms of the linguistic status of enrolled students, but also in terms of student ethnicity, student poverty, and school location. This provides a context for a discussion of school resources and services.



## School Resources

### Teachers at High-LEP schools

- Less academic preparation
- Less likely to be certified (full certification)
- Non-ESL/Bilingual teachers more likely to hold ESL certification and receive LEP-focused Professional Development

Overall, teachers in High-LEP schools have less academic preparation than their counterparts in other schools. Sixty-six percent of teachers in High-LEP schools indicate their highest degree is a bachelor's degree, versus about 55 percent of those in other schools. Only 33 percent of teachers in High-LEP schools hold a master's degree, while about 45 percent of teachers in Low- and No-LEP schools do.

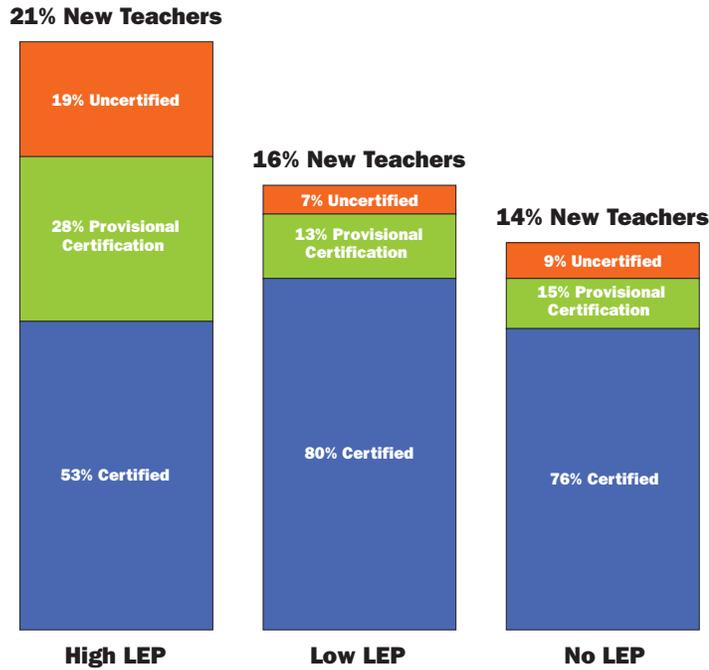
Teachers in High-LEP schools are more likely to have provisional, emergency, or temporary certification than are those in other schools. Teachers in High-LEP schools are not less likely to be certified in their main teaching field than those in schools with fewer LEP students. Large differences emerge, however, when the type of certification is examined. Teachers in High-LEP schools are substantially less likely to have full or probationary certification (indicating that they have completed a traditional teacher preparation program) and are more likely to have provisional, temporary, or emergency certification. This is partly because a greater proportion of teachers in High-LEP schools is new to the profession.

Teachers at High-LEP schools are more likely to hold an ESL/bilingual certificate even though this is neither their first nor the second teaching assignment (about 8 percent of High-LEP versus 2 percent of Low-LEP teachers). In addition, much higher proportions of general education teachers (those who do not specifically teach bilingual education or ESL) received training geared towards teaching LEP students in High-LEP schools (63%) than is true in Low-LEP schools (25%).



## School Resources

**Certification Status of New Teachers**



Teachers in High-LEP schools are more likely to be new to the profession than are teachers in Low- or No-LEP Schools.

New teachers are, in general, less likely to be fully certified than are veteran teachers, but there are also differences in certification across type of school: slightly more than 50 percent of teachers in High-LEP schools have full certification, while nearly 80 percent of teachers at Low- and No-LEP schools do.

What is happening with the difference? New teachers at High-LEP schools are two to three times more likely to be uncertified (but in a certification program) and are twice as likely to have provisional, temporary, or emergency certification than new teachers at Low- or No-LEP schools.

High-LEP schools are, therefore, at a double disadvantage: they have a larger share of less-experienced teachers and their new teachers are less likely to be certified.



## School Resources

### Principals at High-LEP schools

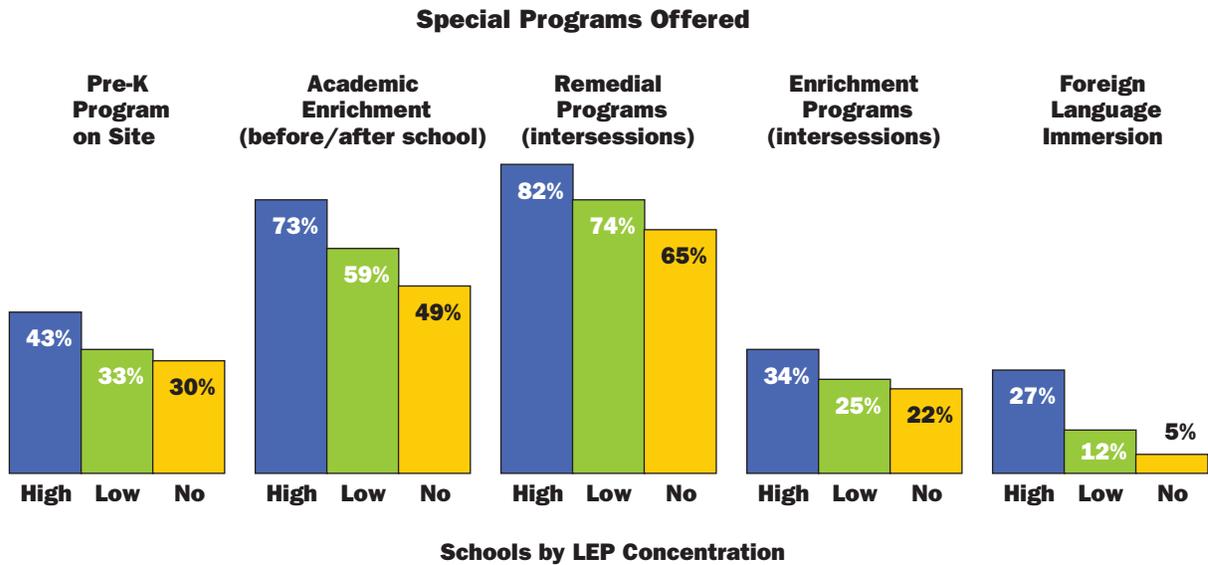
- Less education and training
- Less experience as principals

Principals at Low- and No-LEP schools have more advanced credentials on average than principals at High-LEP schools. The majority of principals at all three types of schools hold Master's degrees. But principals in Low- and No-LEP schools are more likely than those in High-LEP schools to have completed additional post-MA education specialist degrees or professional diplomas.

Principals in High-LEP schools have fewer years of experience as principals, but roughly the same amount of prior teaching experience, than principals in schools with fewer or no LEP students. On average, principals in High-LEP schools have almost a year less experience at their current school than Low-LEP principals, and almost two years less experience than principals in schools with no LEP students (4.25 years versus 5 and 6 years, respectively). Combining teaching experience prior to and since becoming principals, principals at all three types of schools have roughly the same amount of teaching experience, on average about 14 years.



## School Resources



This graph suggests that instructional contexts vary significantly by LEP school type: High-LEP schools are more likely to offer support and remedial programs.

Specifically, High-LEP schools are more likely to have a pre-K program on site (43 percent of the High-LEP schools have such a program versus 30 to 33 percent of schools in the other LEP types). They are also significantly more likely to offer academic support programs—including summer school programs, whether for remedial or advancement purposes, and before- and after-school academic enrichment programs. In addition, High-LEP schools have a higher incidence of foreign language immersion programs, likely building on the language abilities ELL students bring with them to the classroom.



## Conclusions

- **High Concentration of LEP students in few schools** (10% of elementary schools educate 70% of LEP students)
- **High Convergence of at-risk factors in High-LEP schools** (urban; poor; ethnic minority; language; high enrollment; health)
- **Resources differ in High- versus Low-LEP schools** (LEP-focused services; Principals; Teachers)

**L**EP students are concentrated/seggregated in relatively few schools. Only 10 percent of U.S. elementary schools educate 70 percent of LEP students. And nearly half of elementary schools serve no LEP students.

In addition to serving high proportions of English Language Learners, High-LEP schools are more likely than other school types to be located in urban areas, and therefore have many characteristics associated with urban schools: larger enrollments, larger class sizes, greater racial and ethnic diversity, higher incidence of student poverty and health problems, etc.

Important differences across school types are also found in terms of school resources. Teachers and principals at High-LEP schools have, on average, less experience and qualifications than those at schools with few or no LEP children.

High-LEP schools are, however, more likely to provide or encourage professional development that focuses on the needs of LEP children and to offer enrichment and supplemental support programs.



## Issues and Policy Implications

- **Concentration**  
Critical mass  
Multiple/overlapping categories
- **Convergence**  
Cut-off for reporting performance by subgroups  
Immigration trends reinforce segregation?  
(Spread of Low-LEP schools or reproduction of High-LEP model in new places)
- **Resources**  
“Highly qualified” school staff  
High- versus Low-LEP schools

Schools with a high concentration of LEP students are more likely to have specialized programs and professional training geared towards LEP students. Since the high density of LEP enrollment may make the provision of specialized services more cost-effective and a higher priority, it is more likely that such services will be offered.

Children who are limited English proficient are likely to be racial or ethnic minorities and to be economically disadvantaged. As such, these students may come under NCLB's accountability requirements multiple times. LEP students in Low-LEP schools who might be overlooked in the LEP category because of low representation may receive attention because of their ethnicity or poverty status. On the other hand, schools that serve LEP students who fall into multiple NCLB categories may encounter difficulties in addressing the multiple disadvantages posed by language and poverty that may require different interventions.

High-LEP schools are less likely to have certified teachers, another requirement of NCLB to be enforced in 2006.

Thirty percent of LEP students are served in schools with low concentration of such students. Schools with small LEP populations may not need to disaggregate test scores by LEP status, weakening the effect of this provision of the law.

As immigration continues to spread to the so-called “new growth” states, will the High-LEP school model identified here spread to new areas of the country? At least in the short run, a growth in the number of Low-LEP schools is likely. We need to consider, in light of the findings of this research, whether these schools will be prepared to comply with the law—offering, for example, supplemental services.



## Six Challenges for NCLB

- **Rapid change and dispersal to new growth communities**
- **Higher share of foreign born “late entrants” in secondary vs. elementary schools**
- **Children of immigrants fit into multiple “protected” groups, complicating accountability**
- **High concentration of LEPs**
- **Over half of LEPs in both elementary and secondary schools are U.S.-born**
- **Most LEP children live in linguistically isolated families**

**T**he first challenge is rapid, immigration-led demographic change – especially in new growth states.

The second challenge is the concentration of late-entering immigrant and recently arrived immigrant kids in secondary schools, highlighting the fact that secondary schools in the U.S. are often not equipped to teach basic language skills and content courses to these late entrants.

A third, related challenge is the fact that children of immigrants fall into multiple protected groups under NCLB – they’re not only often considered low income but minority and LEP – a kind of triple jeopardy that means schools in which they are concentrated have more standards to meet and that they are less likely to meet them.

The fourth challenge is high concentration of LEP students in few schools.

Fifth is that over half of both LEP elementary and secondary students are natives at minimum stands as eloquent testimony to the need for the kind of accountability that NCLB at least promises.

Sixth and last is the fact that most of these children do not just attend segregated schools but also live in linguistically isolated families: this underscores the value of holistic programs that serve the whole family.