

# The Linguistic Landscape of Nevada Schools

Issue #3

Fall 2004

Coping with the growing number of students who come to school with limited English skills and ensuring that these children are able to participate in and benefit from educational programs and achieve high academic standards create problems for schools (Gittins, 2001). The challenge is complicated by the fact that immigrant parents of limited English proficient (LEP) students tend to fare worse on most indicators of well-being, such as holding less desirable jobs, earning lower incomes, and food insecurity (Urban Institute, 2003).

Nationally, the reported LEP public-school enrollment level continues to increase, reaching 9.3% of the total public-school enrollment of students in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 in 1999-2000. The majority of LEP students were enrolled at the elementary level (nearly 70%), where they represented more than 10% of the total population. The highest percentage of LEP students was in California, New Mexico, Alaska, Arizona, Texas and Nevada in 1999-2000 (Kindler, 2002).

## Definition

According to the U.S. Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs, LEP means an individual -

“A) Who-

1) was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English and comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; or

2) is a Native American or Alaska Native or who is a native resident of the outlying areas and comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on such individual’s level of English language proficiency; or

3) is migratory and whose native language is other than English and comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; and

B) Who has sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language and whose difficulties may deny such individual the opportunity to learn successfully in classrooms where the language of instruction is English or to participate fully in our society” (Kindler, 2002).

Despite this federal definition of LEP, there is no common operational definition used by states to identify LEP

students. The result is that a student could be considered LEP in one state but not in another (Rivera, et al., 1997).

### Nevada

Nevada public-school enrollment grew by 115% from 1984 to 1999 compared to the nation's 19% growth. The number of Nevada LEP students, students whose first language is not English, grew by 682% from 1988-89 (5,175) to 1999-2000 (40,469). By 2005 it is estimated the number will grow to 75,000 students (Nevada Plan, 2002).

Figures from the *2003-2004 State Accountability Report* show 64,181 LEP youth, which indicates that the 2005 prediction is on target. The number of LEP students in Nevada increased from 11.8% in 1999-2000 to 16.7% in 2003-2004, a significant increase. Counties with the greatest number of LEP students were Clark County with 52,352, Washoe County with 8,126, and Carson County with 1,323. See table below.

County	Students with Limited English Proficiency	
	#	%
STATE	64,181	16.7
Carson	1,323	15.0
Churchill	111	2.5
Clark	52,352	19.5
Douglas	475	6.7
Elko	612	6.4
Esmeralda	16	23.2
Eureka	N/A	N/A
Humboldt	283	8.1
Lander	31	2.5
Lincoln	14	1.6
Lyon	269	3.5
Mineral	N/A	N/A
Nye	256	4.8
Pershing	116	13.8
Storey	N/A	N/A
Washoe	8,126	13.5
White Pine	N/A	N/A

'N/A' indicates that this population was not present.  
 Source: Nevada Department of Education, *2003-2004 State Accountability Report*, 2004.

The five most often spoken languages by LEP students in Nevada are Spanish, Tagalog (one of the major languages spoken in the Philippines), Chinese (unspecified), Vietnamese, and Korean (Kindler, 2002). The majority of the LEP students speak Spanish (92%), according to the U.S. Department of Education. This may reflect Nevada's Hispanic student population which increased from 23.9% in 1999-2000 to 25.7% in 2000-2001.

Because of this diversity, conversing with *and* teaching LEP students academic subjects are daunting tasks, both linguistically and culturally. Only 17% of LEP students were involved in instruction that incorporated the student's native language, despite the fact that LEP research has shown that this factor helps the student to make the transition more quickly to functional use of English and facilitates development of academic skill levels (Nevada Plan, 2002).

### Impact of the *No Child Left Behind Act*

The State Board of Education (SBE) has adopted a strategic plan which reflects Nevada's commitment to the principles of the "No Child Left Behind Act" (NCLB) that all children can achieve the same high standards and must be provided the education needed to reach those standards.

The five goals for NCLB accountability are as follows (Nevada Plan, 2002):

- (1) "By 2013-1014, all students will reach high standards, at minimum attaining proficiency or better in reading/language arts and mathematics.
- (2) All LEP students will become proficient in English and reach high academic

standards, at a minimum attaining proficiency or better in reading/language arts and mathematics.

(3) By 2005-2006 all students will be taught by highly qualified teachers.

(4) All students will be educated in learning environments that are safe, drug free, and conducive to learning.

(5) All students will graduate from high school.”

Nevada faces daunting challenges in attempting to meet goals (3) through (5). Nevada reported that only 50% of public-school classes are taught by teachers that the federal law deems highly qualified in terms of having a bachelor’s degree and state certification, and who have shown mastery of all subjects they teach (Feller, 2003). As one of the fastest-growing states in the country, Nevada is constantly adding new schools and new teachers to accommodate the burgeoning number of school-age children. This phenomenon complicates the ability to maintain an adequate number of seasoned, qualified teachers.

Additionally, evidence points to further roadblocks. According to those states who participated in a national Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Nevada rated highest in those students who had tried using marijuana at least once during their lifetime and among the ten top states whose students currently use marijuana (Grunbaum et al., 2001). Nevada rated highest among those states in the number of students who currently inhale intoxicating substances and highest in the number of students who engaged in use of

alcohol on school property and highest in the number of students offered, sold, or given an illegal drug on school property (Grunbaum et al., 2001). The National Institute on Drug Abuse reports that among eighth-graders, Hispanic students have the highest rate of past-year drug use for most illegal drugs, including marijuana, cocaine, and heroin. Not surprisingly, Nevada, as one of the states with the highest Hispanic population, will soon see antidrug advertisements on billboards, buses, and the like, such as “Padres: La Anti-Droga” (Potrikis, 2003). Still, the environment of many LEP students makes goal (4) difficult to attain.

Finally, addressing goal (5) that “all students will graduate from high school,” also is a difficult goal to attain. Nevada, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, ranked 49<sup>th</sup> in the nation in percent of teens ages 16-19 who were high school dropouts, the national rank based on 2001 figures (Annie E. Casey, 2004).

Thirty-five percent of Nevada schools failed to meet all of the educational goals of the NCLB. This places them on a “watch list,” but this designation does not carry any penalties during this transition year. However, confusion exists over what will happen to “watch list” schools if they do not make adequate yearly progress (Bach, 2003). Thus, one does not see an articulated plan with which one can place a high degree of confidence in future success.

It becomes obvious that Nevada, as a state with one of the higher numbers of LEP students, will also face a higher number of obstacles in meeting the goals of the NCLB.

## What Can Be Done

Nevada public schools will benefit from special funding addressing the many problems facing the nation's schools and designed to:

- (1) boost the quality of education for disadvantaged children,
- (2) ensure that every public-school child in Nevada learns to read at or above grade level by the third grade,
- (3) train and retain skilled educators,
- (4) ensure safe and drug-free schools,
- (5) fund after-school programs for at-risk children
- (6) help Nevada school districts assess how well children are learning and schools are teaching,
- (7) ensure greater access to a college education for deserving disadvantaged students (White House Release, 2003).

Although this appears to be good news for children and families of Nevada, controversy exists over whether the costs of implementing the above programs will exceed the parameters of the federal funding (Whaley, 2003).

Nevada now faces a public-perception problem. *Las Vegas Review-Journal* headlines read "Schools Not Meeting Goals," "Schools Fall Short of Goals," and "Number of Inadequate Schools Grows." Superintendent Carlos Garcia explains that Nevada schools must get 100% on basic skills test results, as well as student participation in testing or they fail. "We're hoping that people will look at what the sub-issues are and realize that these are not bad schools"(Bach, 2003).

## References

- Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kids Count Data Book 2004, 2004.
- Bach, Lisa Kim, "Schools Fall Short of Goals," *The Las Vegas Review-Journal*, p.1A, 10/10/03.
- Bach, Lisa Kim, "Number of Inadequate Schools Grows," *The Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 10/30/03.
- Bach, Lisa Kim, "Schools Not Meeting Goals," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, p.1B, 11/6/03.
- Feller, Ben, "Wisconsin Leads in Measure of Teacher Quality," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, p.7A, 10/21/03.
- Gittins, Naomi, "Educating Students with Limited English Skills," *Inquiry & Analysis*, ED 454725, pp. 1-2,7, January 2001. Available online at: <<http://www.edrs.com/Webstore/Download.cfm?ID=650297>> (accessed 11/18/03).
- Grunbaum, Jo Anne, et al., "Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2001," *MMWR Surveillance Summaries*, 6/28/02.
- Kindler, Anneka L., "Survey of the States' Limited English Proficient Students & Available Educational Programs and Services 1999-2000 Summary Report," *U.S. Department of Education*, Task 5.1, Final May 2002. Available online at: <<http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/ncbepubs/seareports/99-00/sea9900.pdf>> (accessed 11/18/03).
- Nevada State Board of Education "The Nevada Plan All Children Can Succeed" *Consolidated Plan for the Implementation of the "No Child Left Behind Act,"* June, 2002.
- Potrikus, Alaina Sue, "New Anti-drug Effort Targets Hispanic Teens," *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 10/30/03.
- Rivera, Charlene, Vincent, Carolyn, Hafner, Anne & LaCelle-Peterson, Mark, "Standards and Assessment," *ERIC//AE Digest Series EDO-TM-97-02*, March 1997. Available online at: <[http://www.ceee.gwu.edu/standards\\_assessments/research\\_LEPstateassess.htm](http://www.ceee.gwu.edu/standards_assessments/research_LEPstateassess.htm)> (accessed 11/18/03).
- The Urban Institute, "Data on Immigrants in U.S. Communities," *The New Neighbors, 2000*, pp. 1-15. Available online at: <[http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/310844\\_the\\_new\\_neighbors.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/310844_the_new_neighbors.pdf)> (accessed 11/18/03).
- U.S. Department of Education, "NEVADA Most Commonly Spoken Languages" *Survey of the States' Limited English Proficient Students and Available Educational Programs and Services, 2000-2001*, "October 2002. Available online at: <<http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/states/reports/statedata/2001/pdffiles/Nevada-Comp.pdf>> (accessed 11/18/03).
- The White House, "The No Child Left Behind Act Is Good News for Children and Families of Nevada" *U.S. Department of Education*, "2003. Available online at: <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/education/states/nv.html>> (accessed 11/18/03).

Text by  
Freda Klein, EdD  
KIDS COUNT Data Book Project Assistant, CBER

Layout by  
Wil Cope, Graduate Assistant, CBER  
Juliette Tennert, Graduate Assistant, CBER



If you need more specific information about the children and youth in your local area, contact Nevada KIDS COUNT, Keith Schwer, PhD, Director CBER or Rennae Daneshvary, PhD, Interim Nevada KIDS COUNT Coordinator, Assistant Director CBER

Phone: (702) 895-3191

Fax: (702) 895-3606

E-mail: [kids@unlv.nevada.edu](mailto:kids@unlv.nevada.edu)



The Center for Business and Economic Research

4505 Maryland Parkway, Box 456002

Las Vegas, Nevada 89154-6002