

MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Education

FROM: Theresa Laskowski via Cindy Marten *cm*

DATE: May 24, 2019

SUBJECT: RECLASSIFICATION

At the recent District English Learner Advisory Committee (DELAC) Executive Board meeting, some confusion arose regarding the guidance principals have received on the reclassification of English-Language Learners. As a result, you may receive questions from DEALC committee members, or the broader community, on this topic. The purpose of this memo is to clarify any confusion on the issue.

Our district continues to set high standards for excellence and equity across every community we serve. The recent study from the Learning Policy Institute (LPI), co-authored by State Board of Education Chair Linda Darling-Hammond, shows the value of keeping standards high. San Diego Unified was identified as one where students of color are “beating the odds” and outperforming their peers in other districts across the state after adjusting for social and economic factors. (Source: “Students of color show extraordinary levels of academic achievement in some California School Districts,” Learning Policy Institute, May 16, 2019)

On October 8, 2018, we advised principals, through a memo, to set a goal of reclassifying 75% of their eligible students. The exact language reads as follows. “You are encouraged to reclassify a minimum of 75% of your potential reclassification students before the ELPAC window opens February 1, 2019.”

The above language was the cause of confusion at the DELAC meeting this week. To be clear:

1. The 75% target is a goal -- not a quota. The memo intentionally avoids use of words like “shall” or “must.”
2. Our reason for setting this 75% goal was to set high expectations for our students and our schools. The target was selected as reasonable based on our past experience.

3. The targeted potential reclassification students are students who have met the English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) requirements. Students must attain an overall English performance level of Level 4 on the ELPAC and demonstrate basic skill in ELA as evidenced on SBAC, FAST, or DRA. Level 4 is the highest level of achievement it is possible to score on the test.
4. Students must have a teacher recommendation and a parent consultation to reclassify.

The San Diego Unified School District and the State of California have made major changes in recent years to the way English learners are supported, and how to best measure their progress. The district strongly supports the state's decision to require more rigorous testing, teacher recommendation and parent consultation to help determine when English learners are ready for reclassification.

San Diego Unified has seen a significant decrease in the number of long-term English language learners (EL students who attend district schools for more than six years without attaining reclassification). In 2013, the district had 5,704 long-term EL students; in 2014, the number dropped to a little more than 5,200; in 2015, the number fell to 4,884; in 2016, the district had 3,982 long-term EL students. In 2017, there were 3,516 long-term EL students in the district; in 2018, the number of long-term EL students was 2,971; and as of March 2019, the district reported 2,686 long-term EL students enrolled.

We continue to review the data on this topic. Past research by Dr. Julian Betts from the University of California at San Diego suggests students are being reclassified in San Diego Unified at the appropriate time in their academic career. However, more research on the topic is needed.

I hope the above information is helpful to you as you engage your constituents in conversations regarding this crucial topic.

CM:jm