

**FINAL REPORT FOR SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER
REGARDING
JEFFERSON PARISH PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM'S LEP PROGRAM**

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SUMMARY

I was contacted by SPLC to provide an expert opinion regarding the English as a Second Language (ESL) program at Jefferson Parish Public School System (JPPSS). Upon signing a retainer, I was given access to several pieces of data, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Disaggregated school and district performance data,
- School enrollment information,
- LEP curriculum information,
- Teacher certification information,
- District budget information, and
- Student record information.

This report summarizes some of the major findings/trends in the data while highlighting substantive concerns that warrant further investigation. This report is intended to be summative in nature, with the full understanding that the data provided could only yield a partial picture of the ESL program and the performance of students identified as English Language Learners (ELLs) at JPPSS. It is my professional recommendation, that, following review of this report, JPPSS undertake a comprehensive evaluation of its ESL program including analysis of additional data, interviews with school personnel and district/school administrators, structured observations in classrooms, and interviews with program participants and their parents.

Overall, an analysis of the data provided yielded the following major trends/themes:

- The ESL curriculum offered by JPPSS appears to be solid, but ESL teacher certification remains a concern. There are not enough ESL-certified teachers in the district to effectively teach the rapidly-growing LEP population, and paraprofessionals are used to compensate for this shortage.
- Limited English Proficient (LEP) students may be under-enrolled in the ESL program at JPPSS.
- JPPSS is struggling to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the LEP subgroup—particularly for Middle and High School students. While this subgroup has shown improvement since 2006, the underlying substantive performance of LEP students in the district continues to be unsatisfactory.

- Of the 18 student records reviewed, Elementary LEP students appear to do well on the English Language Development Assessment (ELDA), while the scores of Middle and High school LEP students appear to stagnate after years of testing. However, all LEP students seem to be struggling academically on standardized tests (e.g., iLEAP, LEAP, GEE) as well as in particular subject areas.
- Based on the information provided, it appears that LEP students are not adequately monitored once they exit the ESL program.

When viewed holistically, given the facts presented, it is my professional opinion that JPPSS stifles the educational opportunities of English Language Learners enrolled in the district. The district clearly struggles to make AYP for LEP students and faces significant challenges in ensuring all LEP students perform at satisfactory levels on state tests of student performance. This leaves LEP students at a disadvantage when it comes to preparation for higher education, as well preparing them with the skills and credentials necessary for gainful employment in today's workforce.

EMERGING THEMES/TRENDS

- I. The ESL curriculum offered by JPPSS appears to be solid, but ESL teacher certification remains a concern. There are not enough ESL-certified teachers in the district to effectively teach the rapidly-growing LEP population, and paraprofessionals are used to compensate for this shortage.*

As a whole, the ESL curriculum guides provided to ESL teachers by JPPSS appear to be both comprehensive and rigorous. All of the curriculum ESL guides reviewed (from Kindergarten through High School) are grounded in best practice for ELL's and make concrete connections to the Louisiana Standards for English Language Arts. Equally important is that the curriculum guides are sensitive to the varied needs of diverse learners (e.g., accommodating of learning styles, utilizing diverse assessment strategies, etc.), and provide effective pacing guidelines for classroom instruction and lesson planning for effective scaffolding of student learning. Moreover, the curriculum guidelines are structured to the developmental needs of the student (i.e., Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced).

Notwithstanding, a curriculum guide is only as good as the teacher who implements it. Unfortunately, because there was no opportunity to observe teacher instruction first-hand, there is no way to determine whether the ESL curriculum is being followed or implemented at the classroom level. In addition, without interviewing ESL teachers and students, it is difficult to determine whether the curriculum is effective in facilitating

instruction and/or student learning and identify how it can be improved. This is an area that clearly necessitates further research/investigation.

To be certain, the curriculum guides are designed to be used by ESL teachers in their classrooms. Clearly, having teachers with ESL certification and current knowledge of “best practice” is not only important, but critical across the curriculum. Unfortunately, I was only provided with the ESL certificates for elementary teachers at JPPSS. Although it is unknown how many total elementary teachers there are at JPPSS, or how many students these ESL teachers serve, we do know the following information about them:

1. There are 58 elementary ESL teachers at JPPSS with Lifetime Certification; of these, 29 ESL teachers received their lifetime certification over 10 years ago.
2. There are eight (8) elementary ESL teachers at JPPSS whose licensure will expire in the year 2016.
3. There are seven (7) elementary ESL teachers at JPPSS whose licensure will expire in the year 2015.
4. There are 14 elementary ESL teachers at JPPSS whose licensure will expire in the year 2014.
5. There are 24 elementary ESL teachers at JPPSS whose licensure will expire in the year 2013.
6. There are eight (8) elementary ESL teachers at JPPSS whose licensure expired this year.
7. There are five (5) elementary ESL teachers at JPPSS whose licensure expired last year.

It is important to note that this data does not contain information about teachers who have renewed—or are in the process of renewing—their teaching license. In addition, it is not known whether teachers with expired licenses were granted permission by the district to teach while they working on their licensure renewal and/or ESL certification. Clearly, this is another area in need of further research.

What is evident, however, is that regardless of the actual number of elementary teachers with ESL certification in the district, their numbers appear to be disproportionate to the number of elementary ELL students at JPPSS in need of services (N= 1955). Given the large numbers of ESL teachers whose teaching license is due to expire in the next few years, it is imperative that JPPSS think about ESL teacher recruitment and retention.

According to JPPSS grant applications, and more recently acquired data, it appears that the district may be relying on a mix of paraprofessionals, ESL-teachers, and “designated”

ESL classrooms to deliver services to students in the ESL program (see Table 1 below). This is a not a recommended practice, as non-ESL certified teachers and/or paraprofessionals may not have the requisite training, skills, or pedagogical knowledge to effectively deliver instruction to students with diverse linguistic needs. Recruiting and retaining a cadre of ESL-certified teachers is a clear way to ensure that instruction is delivered in the ways outlined in the ESL curriculum guides.

This data indicates there are 81 ESL teachers and 41 “designated” teachers servicing 3,308 LEP students. This results in a teacher-student ratio of approximately 1:27. However, the data also finds there are 59 ESL paraprofessionals in the district, effectively lowering the overall ESL staff-student ratio to 1:18. Clearly, JPPSS seems to be relying heavily on its ESL paraprofessionals to deliver critical instruction to students. This finding is most evident in ESL-impacted schools (e.g., Birney, Bissonet, Ellender Hearst, King, Meisler, Solis, West Jefferson) where the Teacher-Student ratio, exclusive of paraprofessionals, can be as high as one teacher for every 50 ESL students.

TABLE 1
JPPSS 2012/2013 TEACHER/PARAPROFESSIONAL STAFFING

	# ESL Teachers	# Designated Teachers	# Paras	# LEP Students	Staff-Student Ratio w/Paras	Teacher-Student Ratio w/o Paras
Adams*	2.5	0	1	83	1:24	1:33
Airline Park	0	0	0	3	**	**
Alexander*	1	6	2	129	1:14	1:18
Audubon*	1	1	1	66	1:22	1:33
Birney*	1	2	3	148	1:25	1:49
Bissonet*	2	0	1	99	1:33	1:50
Bonnabel*	4.5	0	2	120	1:18	1:27
Boudreaux*	0	6	2.5	85	1:10	1:14
Bridgedale*	2	0	1	70	1:23	1:35
Butler*	1	0	0.5	21	1:14	1:21
Chateau*	2	3	2	91	1:13	1:18
Cherbonnier*	1	0	0	9	1:9	1:9
Clancy Maggiorie*	2	0	1	63	1:21	1:31
Collins	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dolhonde*	2	0	0.5	45	1:18	1:22
Douglass	0	0	0	0	0	0
East Jefferson*	1	0	1	25	1:12	1:25
Ehret	1	0	0	15	1:15	1:15
Ellender	1	0	1	57	1:28	1:57

Ellis*	3	0	1	40	1:10	1:13
Estelle*	1	0	1	38	1:19	1:38
Fisher	0.5	0	0	4	1:8	1:8
Ford*	1	0	0.5	28	1:18	1:28
G. Cox*	2	0	1	55	1:18	1:27
Grand Isle	0	0	0	2	**	**
Green Park	0	0	0	3	**	**
Green Lawn*	2	0	1	90	1:30	1:45
Gretna Middle*	2	0	1	69	1:23	1:38
Gretna #2 Acad	0	0	0	0	0	0
H. Cox	2	0	1.5	35	1:10	1:17
Harahan	0	0	0	1	**	**
Hart*	1	4	1	78	1:13	1:15
Haynes	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hazel Park	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hearst*	1	4	2	161	1:23	1:32
Higgins*	2	0	0.5	35	1:14	1:17
Janet	0	0	0	3	**	**
Jefferson Comm	0	0	0	1	**	**
Jefferson Elem	0	0	0	1	**	**
Jefferson, Thomas	0	0	0	0	0	0
Johnson Gretna*	2	0	1.5	97	1:28	1:48
Keller*	2	1	1	81	1:20	1:27
Kerner*	0.5	0	0	15	1:30	1:30
King*	3	0	2	180	1:36	1:60
Lincoln	0	0	0	3	**	**
Livaudais*	3	0	1.5	97	1:21	1:32
M. Harris Elem	2	0	1	**	***	***
Marrero Middle*	2	0	1	1	1:0.3	1:0.5
McDonogh 26	1	0	0.5	26	1:17	1:26
Meisler*	3	0	1.5	131	1:29	1:44
Metarie Academy*	0	0	0	3	**	**
Pitre*	1	0	0.5	12	1:8	1:12
Pittman	1	0	0.5	18	1:12	1:18
Riverdale High*	1	0	0	16	1:16	1:16
Riverdale Middle.	1	0	0	19	1:19	1:19
Riviere*	2	2	1	107	1:21	1:27
Roosevelt*	2	0	1	61	1:20	1:30
Ruppel	0	0	0	0	0	0
Schneckenburger*	1	0	1	37	1:18	1:37
Solis*	1	4	4	143	1:16	1:28
Strehle*	1	0	1	24	1:12	1:24

T.H. Harris Middle*	1	0	0.5	**	***	***
Taylor	0	0	0	0	0	0
Terrytown*	0	6	2	167	1:21	1:27
Thibodeaux	0	0	0	1	**	**
Truman*	1	0	0.5	32	1:21	1:32
Wall*	1	0	1.5	25	1:10	1:25
Washington	0	0	0	3	**	**
Westbank Comm	0	0	0	1	**	**
West Jeff*	3	0	2	146	1:29	1:48
Woodland West*	2	2	3	78	1:11	1:19
Woodmere*	1	0	0.5	11	1:7	1:11
TOTAL	81	41	59	3308	1:18	1:27

Source: JPPSS

*Designated ESL school sites

** Ratio cannot be calculated because there is no ESL staff at the school

*** Ratio cannot be calculated because there are two data points with the same school name

Not only does the data indicate that there are several schools with LEP students and no ESL teacher or paraprofessional to teach them, but it also shows there are not enough ESL teachers and support staff across the entire district to effectively teach the recommended ESL curriculum set forth in their staffing model (i.e., beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels). In fact, the designated ESL school sites, identified in the above table, are insufficient to address the linguistic needs of a student population that is clearly represented across the majority of schools in the district.

II. Limited English Proficient (LEP) students may be under-enrolled in the ESL program at JPPSS

According to 2009 enrollment data gathered by the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, there were 3,130 students in need of ESL services, but JPPSS only provided ESL services to 185 of these students. However, the most recent data for 2012-2013 indicates that the number of students receiving services at JPPSS increased dramatically to 3,308. The drastic contrast in these figures within such a compressed time-span suggests that the LEP enrollment figures may be imprecise and/or that there is disproportionality in ESL program enrollment relative to the number of students needing ESL services.

For example, the number of students in the district steadily increased between 2009-2011 (Louisiana Department of Education, 2012). However, in the same time period, the growth in the Latina/o student population was much higher than the population growth of other student groups, suggesting that there was a much faster influx of Latina/o students into the district during this time. While many of these Latina/o newcomers may not have

needed ESL services, the parallel growth in ESL program enrollment would suggest otherwise. Therefore, there is a strong possibility that many Latina/o students are still in need of ESL program services. Clearly, more research is needed in order to better gauge the accuracy of this assumption.

Current research notwithstanding, the available data does indicate that ELL students tend to be concentrated in a handful of schools. In fact, the 20 schools with the highest LEP student population in Table 1 enroll nearly 2/3 of all students enrolled in the ESL program at JPPSS. However, it is equally important to note that ELL students are widely dispersed across the majority of schools in the district. Therefore, the rapid influx of ELL students provides enhanced challenges to meet their linguistic needs—particularly in light of the staffing model for proposed for ELL services at JPPSS.

The data provided by the Office for Civil Rights also show that the vast majority of students—both in need of ESL services and enrolled in the ESL program—are of Hispanic and Asian descent. Moreover, this particular data suggest that in some schools, more than 50% of Hispanic and Asian students are in need of ESL services but may not be receiving these services at their school. There are many reasons why this may be the case, including the possibility that parents may have opted not to have their child/children participate in the ESL program. Therefore more research is necessary before definitive conclusions can be drawn.

In sum, this data suggests that JPPSS may be under-enrolling students in the LEP program relative to the rapid growth of students needing services in the district. If this is, indeed, the case, it would be take a small miracle to find a large enough pool of ESL teachers and staff with the requisite skills to provide these services in such a short amount of time—reinforcing the point that many students in the program may be receiving instruction by paraprofessionals as opposed to trained certified ESL teachers. Therefore, it is highly important to closely examine the JPPSS staffing plans, to determine how they are staffing these ESL classrooms. Based on current research and best practice, the current number of teachers on the books is insufficient to staff these classes relative to the high number of LEP students enrolled in the district. Moreover, placing a large number of students under the tutelage of paraprofessionals is not only ill-advised, but may lead to gross inequities in tracking and ultimately a systematic marginalization of ESL students.

**TABLE 2:
STUDENTS ENROLLED IN LEP SERVICES IN SELECT JPPSS SCHOOLS**

SCHOOL	LEVEL	# of STUDENTS RECEIVING LEP SERVICES in 2009 ^a	# of STUDENTS RECEIVING LEP SERVICES in 2011 ^b
Bonnabel Magnet	High School	0	258
West Jefferson	High School	5	237
Grace King	High School	0	178
Alice Birney	Elementary	5	167
A.C .Alexander	Elementary	10	140
Paul J. Solis	Elementary	10	140
Phoebe Hearst	Elementary	10	137
J.D. Meisler	Middle School	5	135
Terrytown	Elementary	15	119
Geraldine Boudreaux	Elementary	10	108
Livaudais	Middle School	0	97
John Q. Adams	Middle School	5	96
Woodland West	Elementary	10	92
Chateau Estates	Elementary	10	91
Marie B. Riviere	Elementary	5	89
Estelle	Elementary	10	88
Harold Keller	Elementary	5	82
Gretna	Middle School	0	82
William Hart	Elementary	5	69
Theodore Roosevelt	Middle School	0	61

^aSource: US Department of Education, Civil Rights Data Collection (2009)

^bSource: S.I.S. Report as of 9/30/11, Louisiana Department of Education (2011)

III. JPPSS is struggling to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the LEP subgroup—particularly for Middle and High School students. While this subgroup has shown improvement since 2006, the underlying substantive performance of LEP students in the district continues to be unsatisfactory.

Every school district in the state of Louisiana must demonstrate that identified subgroups of students are proficient in English Language Arts and Mathematics by meeting or exceeding a minimum performance threshold in order for the district to meet AYP. This threshold is referred to as the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO).

Middle School LEP students did not meet the AMO in at least one subject area in the 2006-2007, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 academic years, but did meet AMO in both subject areas in 2009-2010. High School LEP students, however, did not meet AMO in the English Language Arts area in all four years for which data was available.

**TABLE 3:
MIDDLE SCHOOL LEP SUBGROUP MEETING ANNUAL MEASURABLE OBJECTIVE
THRESHOLD IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS AND MATHEMATICS**

	English Language Arts	Mathematics
2006-2007	NO	YES
2007-2008	NO	NO
2008-2009	NO	YES
2009-2010	YES	YES

**TABLE 4:
HIGH SCHOOL LEP SUBGROUP MEETING ANNUAL MEASURABLE OBJECTIVE
THRESHOLD IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS AND MATHEMATICS**

	English Language Arts	Mathematics
2006-2007	NO	YES*
2007-2008	NO	YES*
2008-2009	NO	YES
2009-2010	NO	YES

* Indicates that subgroup met AMO because it was within the confidence interval.

Normally, not meeting AMO translates into not meeting AYP for the district for a particular subgroup. However, a district can still make AYP if said subgroup showed improvement by 10% in the non-proficiency rate for the previous year. In all four years for which data was available, both Middle and High School LEP students at JPPSS demonstrated such improvement. This suggests that while a sizeable number of Middle and High School LEP students are performing at the “Unsatisfactory” or “Approaching Basic” levels on the annual standardized test, the number of students scoring at higher levels in subsequent years is greater than 10%. In other words, while the margin of improvement was sufficiently high to merit designation for NCLB purposes, the underlying substantive performance of LEP students continues to be unsatisfactory.

IV. *Of the 18 student records reviewed, Elementary LEP students appear to do well on the English Language Development Assessment (ELDA), while the scores of Middle and High school LEP students appear to stagnate after years of testing. However, all LEP students seem to be struggling academically on standardized tests (e.g., iLEAP, LEAP, GEE) as well as in particular subject areas.*

One trend that was apparent in the student records reviewed was that the district seemed to do a good job of testing and placing LEP students based on their English language proficiency. Most of the elementary level students seemed to start off with a rudimentary command of English, but quickly gained English proficiency (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) within 2-3 years' time. Indeed, it was not uncommon for students to start off at the "Beginner" or "Lower Intermediate" levels based on their initial LAS assessment, but then test at Level 4 or 5 on the ELDA within a short period of time. Due to this rapid acquisition of the English language, many of the elementary students were "exited" from the ESL program in the early elementary grades. Unfortunately, once they exited the program, these students did not perform well on many standardized measures of academic competence.

CASE STUDY #1

The story of Student 1 is not atypical. Hers is the story of many students who were exited from the ESL program after a brief period. Student 1 enrolled at JPPSS in 2004, when she was in the first grade. After initial screening for language competence via the LAS exam, it was determined that she needed ESL services. Student 1 was provided with three hours of ESL services daily at JPPSS. At the end of her first school year, the LAS exam was re-administered; school officials found that Student 1 had made little progress in her English language competence. Student 1 was held back and repeated the first grade.

By the time she was in second grade, Student 1's English language skills had dramatically improved. She tested at the "Advanced Proficiency" Level in all areas of the ELDA and her language development was determined to be at the "Intermediate" level. Her grades appeared to be solid as well. She was successfully promoted to the third grade and was provided with the necessary accommodations to be successful in her classes. Teachers were required to provide Student 1 with extended time for class assignments and examinations, obligated to administer instruction in individual/small groups, provide Student 1 with repeated directions to ensure that she understood class assignments, and were asked to read tests aloud to minimize any misunderstanding.

Despite these accommodations, Student 1's performance on the state iLEAP test was not very good. In third grade, she received "Unsatisfactory" marks in both the Mathematics and Social Studies portions of the iLEAP exam, while receiving "Approaching Basic" marks in English and Science. Nevertheless, Student 1 was promoted to the fourth grade, and ESL services were scaled back to one hour per day. By the end of her fourth grade year, Student 1's ELDA scores were impressive and she was successfully "exited" from the ESL program.

Student 1's fifth grade year was rocky, as her grades in reading and math fluctuated dramatically during interim grading periods. Nevertheless, she managed to earn a grade of "C" in both classes and was successfully promoted to the sixth grade. Unfortunately, Student 1's test scores were not particularly impressive as she was found to be "Well Below Average" in Reading and "Somewhat Below Average" in Math and Language on the norm-referenced ITBS test—while also scoring "Approaching Basic" in Math and Science and "Unsatisfactory" in Social Studies on the criterion-referenced iLEAP test. Despite these struggles, Student 1 was promoted to the sixth grade where she continued to struggle with the state standardized tests the following year. Her grades suffered as well, as she received "C's" and "D's" in several of her courses while obtaining the minimum grades to earn promotion to the next grade level.

Student 1 is now in the eighth grade, but her grades and LEAP test scores have not dramatically improved. Her 2012 LEAP scores indicate that she is scoring at the "Approaching Basic" level in all four areas of the state test. Moreover, her grades continue to be marginally acceptable—particularly in Math and Reading where she is receiving "D's" and is on the verge of failing.

Student 1's story is not that uncommon at JPPSS—particularly among the files that I reviewed. Many ELL students are rapidly transitioned out of the ESL program, only to find themselves struggling in academic areas down the road. A disturbing trend is that students are being promoted to the next grade level (and to the next successive course) when they are barely passing their coursework at the most basic/rudimentary level of understanding. This practice ultimately sets up students for academic difficulty and possible failure in subsequent school years.

In contrast, students who entered JPPSS in Middle and High School seemed not to transition to Full English as quickly as their younger counterparts. These students tended to test at the "Lower Intermediate" and "Upper Intermediate" levels on the ELDA—particularly in the Reading and Writing assessments—and continued to test at these levels as they progressed in school. As a result, many of these students demonstrated more academic difficulty in their classes (as observed on their end of semester grades,

particularly in English and Mathematics), and struggled on their standardized iLEAP and LEAP tests in subsequent years where they tended to score at the “Unsatisfactory” and “Approaching Basic” levels. They also struggled on the Graduate Exit Exam (GEE) taken during the 10th and 11th grades, where they tended to score at the “Approaching Basic” and “Unsatisfactory” levels in the subject areas tested (Note: LEP students who began taking the End of Year Assessment as the GEE was phased out of use fared no different: They tended to score at the “Needs Improvement” and “Fair” levels).

Moreover, many of the upper level High School students scored well below benchmark on the ACT college entrance exam, as well as other ACT preparation exams taken in the 8th, 9th, and 10th grades. In fact, one LEP student’s ACT scores were so low, that she scored in the 1 percentile in Mathematics (i.e., 99% of all ACT test takers in the state scored above her) and in the 5th percentile in English (i.e., 95% of all ACT test takers in the state scored above her). To be certain, these trends are rather disturbing.

CASE STUDY #2

Student 2 is a special education senior at JPPSS. His records indicate that he enrolled mid-year in 2007, however, there is evidence that Student 2 was enrolled as early as 2006 but transferred to another district before re-enrolling at JPPSS. Student 2’s command of English language has historically been below average—consistently rated as being at the “Beginning” level in Reading, Writing, and Comprehension, while ranking slightly higher (“Lower Intermediate”) in his Listening abilities. In contrast, Student 2’s English speaking abilities are quite developed. In fact, his ELDA scores suggest he is at the “Advanced” level in his ability to speak English. Student 2’s ELDA scores have remained consistent since 2007 with composite scores at the “Beginning” level since being tested. In effect, despite the fact that he can speak English, Student 2 remains unable to fully comprehend the totality of the English language.

To make matters worse, Student 2 has been struggling academically since the 9th grade. He has consistently received “D’s” and “F’s” in his report card (both interim and final reports), and his teachers consistently indicate that he does not complete his homework assignments and that he is not an active participant in class.

Student 2 received straight “F’s” during his 9th grade year, with the exception of Art where he earned a grade of “C.” Despite this poor performance, he was promoted to the 10th grade as well as the next sequence of courses in Math, Science, English, and Social Studies. Not surprisingly, Student 2 received straight “D’s” in all of his courses and an “F” in Physical Education. Because a “D” is considered a passing grade at JPPSS,

Student 2 was promoted to the 11th grade, but was given a lighter academic load during the first semester: a Physical Education course, an ESL course, and a 3 hour Vocational Training course in auto body repair (Student 2 failed the latter two courses, but received a “C” in Physical Education). Unfortunately, instead of offering Student 2 the opportunity to take courses that would solidify his understanding of previous courses that he had failed, Student 2 was promoted to the next sequence of courses in Math, Social Studies, and Science during the second semester of the 11th grade. Needless to say, Student 2 failed all of his courses his second semester of his junior year.

Because of his poor academic performance, Student 2 was held back in the 11th grade. He was given a lighter load during the first semester of his encore year—which included no math or science courses. This seemed to work well for Student 2, because he received three “C’s” and “D” in his courses. During his second semester, Student 2 added two science courses, and finished the year with a cumulative GPA of 3.25 for the year. Indeed, it would appear the Student 2 was finally getting his act together.

During his 12th grade year, Student 2 kept a scaled down course load: a remedial math course, an English course, and a work study course. Student 2 initially struggled in both his English and Math courses, but was able to pass them both with a “D” and “C” respectively.

Despite having marginally completed all of his coursework, Student 2 could not graduate, because he could not pass the GEE examination. Student 2 has taken the exam nine times since his 10th grade year, but received a score of “Unsatisfactory” on all portions of the examination each time. His scores on the LEAP exam were no better: scoring “Unsatisfactory” in all areas every year since starting high school.

Student 2’s story is rather unfortunate. He has struggled every year since arriving at JPPSS, but has seemingly been pushed through the system despite his poor academic performance and his pitiable scores on the state standardized tests. Similar to the previous case, Student 2 was “promoted” to the next grade and to successive courses in Math, Science, Social Studies, and English/Language Arts without the requisite foundation to be successful in those courses. It would appear that Student 2 was simply being set-up to fail within a system that thoughtlessly promoted him to the next grade without consideration for Student 2’s overall readiness and grasp of the course material.

As a whole, this data is disconcerting and warrants serious examination of the factors that are contributing to such low performance on these and similar standardized tests. One area of investigation that may prove fruitful is the relationship between student grades

and subsequent test performance. One trend that seems evident in the data is that many LEP students are marginally passing certain key subject areas (English, Math, Science) with a “D” grade and appear to be struggling throughout the semester in these courses. It appears that many LEP students start off these courses with a “D” or “F” grade, then make slight improvements as the semester advances, only to finish the course with a “D” grade. Because students marginally “pass” these courses, they are promoted to the next level, even though the student had a rudimentary understanding of the course content. Unless there is evidence to the contrary, I can only conclude that this trend is pervasive throughout the district and is impacting ELL students in deleterious ways.

V. Based on the information provided, it appears that LEP students are not adequately monitored once they exit the ESL program.

According to state policy, LEP students are to be monitored for two years once they are “exited” from the ESL program. However, there is no information in the student records about how this happens—leaving one to wonder whether it happens at all, or whether the “monitoring” happens in a more informal fashion that is not documented in the student record.

This is quite concerning because, as has been shown in this report, LEP students continue to struggle academically in particular areas following program exit, and have difficulty on standardized tests in subsequent years.

Clearly, more formal protocols are needed in order to demonstrate how the district is meeting this particular requirement. It is important that schools demonstrate not only how they monitor student progress, but also how they take appropriate steps to ensure that struggling students get the assistance they need in order to be successful in school. Like Student 1, far too many students are being exited from the ESL program, without a coherent system or mechanism to monitor their progress.

CONCLUSION

As a whole, given the facts presented, it strongly appears that LEP students at JPPSS are at a strong disadvantage. Not only is there a lack of ESL-certified teachers in the district, but the ESL enrollment numbers are so high that programs are being staffed by a curious mix of designated teachers and paraprofessionals who do not have the requisite skills or training to work with LEP populations. As a result, LEP students are not making Adequate Yearly Progress (particularly in English/Language Arts) and struggle academically in school and on standardized measures of student comprehension. It appears that all LEP students seem to be struggling academically—including those who have “exited” program and are no longer receiving ESL services.

A disturbing trend is that ESL students—both current students and those who have exited—are not being closely monitored, resulting in students being pushed through the system in a mechanical fashion with no regard for their academic readiness, their comprehension of course content, and their performance on state standardized tests. Clearly, a more comprehensive approach is needed in the district in order to rectify this disturbing trend. This approach should begin with proper staffing of the ESL programs with certified teachers, and should include the proper placement and monitoring of students as they participate in—and transition out of—the ESL program at JPPSS.