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# **English Language Learners: an analysis of policy and achievement over time**

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Abstract: The increasing population of English Language Learners (ELLs) in the United States has forced public school administrators and policy makers to change ELL policies significantly over the past decade. In my study, I focus on looking at the Hartford, Connecticut area ELL policies and programs and how they have changed over time. My study focuses on these changes and how they are associated with the academic achievement gap between ELL and non-ELL students. I used three interviews from administrators and policy-makers to support data analysis with percentages of “at proficiency” students in the Hartford district from the Connecticut Master Test (CMT), and the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT). My findings show that there has been a significant opening in the academic achievement gap between ELL students and non-ELL students over the past eleven years, and that these gaps are associated with frequent changes in ELL policy and practice in Hartford public school districts. Before my research there was a significant lack of data regarding the association between current policy and the achievement gap between ELL students and non-ELL students in Hartford.

Introduction

The uniqueness and diversity exhibited in Connecticut's capital increases learning opportunities for students of all ages. Hartford's high population of immigrants and non-English speakers are just one of the factors that contribute to its increasing importance in Connecticut's social and cultural past, present, and future. In Connecticut, according to the United States Census, about thirteen percent of the population is foreign born and about twenty percent speak a language other than English. In comparison, specifically in Hartford about twenty-one percent of the population of Hartford (26,200 people) is foreign born, and about twenty percent speak a language other than English. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010) Due to these facts, where over forty percent of these immigrants come from Spanish-speaking Latin America, the need for native language instruction in public schools is pivotal to produce an active and able citizenry.

Recently, states in a similar position as Connecticut including California, Arizona, Massachusetts, and Texas, have begun to create language instruction policies that focus on preparing their immigrant and bilingual students to speak English. In California, Arizona, and Massachusetts, respectively forty-two, twenty-eight, and twenty percent of the total population spoke languages other than English at home. Due to the high population of language minority (LM) students, or English Language Learners (ELLs), Congress pushed legislative acts forward as early as 1971 in Massachusetts, 1976 in California, and 1981 in Texas. (Gándara and Hopkins, 2010: 88) The continuing focus on Structured English Emersion (SEI), or a program where "access to native-language instruction is severely restricted, requiring a complex process of parental waivers",

seemed to become the more popular route in approaching inequalities in school districts nationally. (2010: 87)

With the introduction of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, the Hartford Public School District was forced to reevaluate their current policy for ELL students and move towards a policy that would reduce inequalities between ELL students and English Only speakers in the district. According to the NCLB act, there are two ways in which individuals can identify ELL students or LM students: “a state has the flexibility to narrowly define the LEP (Limited English Proficiency) subgroup as only those students receiving direct, daily LEP services.” (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2011: 2) However, this fact sheet defining the NCLB terms clearly states that in a broader definition, a state may “include both students receiving direct services and students being monitored based on their achievement on academic assessments.” (2011: 2) This act is the main reason as to why my research is focusing on strictly standardized test scores for ELL students: because according to the NCLB act, for a school to meet the Average Yearly Progress target (AYP) in Connecticut, the measure is from the CMT and CAPT test results.

Superintendent Steven Adamowski was elected in 2006 and was open with his opinion regarding the NCLB act. From his blog, Adamowski states:

“Congress passed the bipartisan No Child Left Behind Act – which for all of its faults – remains the most important piece of civil rights legislation since the Civil Rights Act. It required that from now on, all education systems would be measured by how well they improve the achievement of their neediest students.” (Adamowski, 2010)

The State Law limiting native language instruction for ELL students in public schools to 30 months or less, and Adamowski’s support for this act, are significant in

understanding policies that were being made at the district level focusing on English language instruction. As will be explained below, this state law was a cap, not a required minimum, and schools could choose to provide no native language instruction at all. Although Adamowski was not involved with the creation of the state laws, under the new focus towards English instruction he did create an all-choice school model with the hopes of spreading ELL students throughout different schools within the district. With this desire to spread ELL students out rather than have them concentrated in only a few schools, there was a significant decrease in native language instruction due to the fact that ELL concentrations were very sparse. As part of Adamowski's choice reforms, the dual language programs that were present in a few schools such as McDonough and Moylan Elementary, were eliminated. These eliminations were not officially part of Adamowski's open choice policy, however it was an outcome of the broader reform. When asked in an interview why dual language programs in Hartford public schools were eliminated, Administrator 1 responded:

“It was a district-wide thing, when the new superintendent, when Dr. Adamowski came on board, um, that was not part of his plan. Um, is it something that we as a department felt bad about? Yes, we believe dual language is a better way to go. Um, as we move to more autonomy at the school level principals could have made that choice! The principal could have said, you know what, I want to keep dual language. But, nobody did.” (Administrator 1, 2011)

The idea of an English-only language policy was one focus of Connecticut's new reform to achieve the goal of closing the achievement gap in the Hartford public school district. During a personal interview, an administrator recalled that as a part of the State's new ELL law, students receive native language support for a maximum time span of thirty months, and then they are transitioned into a classroom where they receive English only instruction. (Administrator 1, Personal Interview, 2011) This means that

many ELL students could be serviced in an English Only classroom before the thirty-month time span and still be within the law.

I undertook this research to uncover the history and administrators' understandings of policies for ELL students in the nation and in Hartford and what kinds of support ELL students receive from the school in their native language. My research addressed the following question: how has the nature of English Language Learner policies and programs changed over the years? In Hartford, how has the ELL and non-ELL student achievement gap changed? In the follow-up question, both Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) results and overall school records between ELL students and Non-ELL students were analyzed to determine the increase or decrease in achievement gap between the two sub-groups.

### Thesis

I argue that according to the data collected by administrators and public officials within the Hartford school district, along with statistics available to the public via the internet, that the emphasis on English language learning for ELL students is associated with a larger gap in academic achievement in standardized test such as CMT and the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) scores between ELL students and Non-ELL students.

### Significance

Throughout Hartford public school's history, the debate regarding what type of language program should be used for instruction for ELL students has been raging. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 sparked the beginning of a new era of debate in this subject, however educators have been aware of the inequalities immigrants have faced due to language in school for decades before NCLB. Ruth Glasser and the Connecticut

Humanities Council writes about these inequalities in their book *Aquí Me Quedo: Puerto Ricans in Connecticut* and the idea of a bilingual education system. They write: “because of the concerns of these migrants, bilingual education was a major community issue from the early 1970’s in all Connecticut towns with large Puerto Rican populations.” (Glasser, 1997: 167) As the history shows, the population of Puerto Ricans in Hartford has consistently been increasing to the current percentage, which is 43.4 percent. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010)

Statistics that have been analyzed by the district show that there is a significant discrepancy in academic achievement between Non ELL students and ELL students. However, research is limited on whether or not the current English-only focused curriculum for ELL students is improving academic achievement, or only associated with the reinforcement of educational inequalities due to language barriers over the years. According to a Connecticut Department of Education Data Bulletin from November 2010, the percentage of students who perform at “proficient or better” in math and reading sections of the CMT and CAPT tests were shocking. When placed side by side and color coded, it is very clear that ELL student percentages at “proficient or better” are significantly lower than scores of “all students” and the AYP target. (Bureau of Data Collection, 2009-10: 6) Why are these differences so drastic? What can be done to decrease these differences? By charting many years of academic testing results from ELL students and Non-ELL students, I hope to find significant patterns that will correlate with the ELL policies and practices from that time to figure out how the achievement gap is being affected by what is happening for ELL students in school.

### Literature Review

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in policies for English Language Learners across the nation. The No Child Left Behind Act under the Bush administration, as well as Propositions used for bilingual education policy in Arizona, California, and Massachusetts were influential in the updated ELL policies in Hartford, Connecticut. My particular research question, again, is as follows: how has the nature of English Language Learner policies and programs changed over the years? In Hartford, how has the ELL and non-ELL student achievement gap changed? I look to draw specific information regarding ELL policy in the past and present throughout the nation and in Hartford, as well as differences in achievement in school for these two different groups.

Patricia Gándara and Megan Hopkins (2010) take the first step in beginning to analyze these policies instated through the nation in their book *Forbidden Language: English Learners and Restrictive Language Policies*. The authors compiled the most recent research “to determine the effects of restricting the use of children’s primary language in the classroom on student outcomes” and “to consider to what extent such policies align with empirical research on English only and bilingual instruction.” (Gándara and Hopkins, 2010: 1) The book pays specific attention to achievement patterns in states where there have been significant language policy changes, such as Arizona, California, and Massachusetts. Based on the studies they assemble, the authors suggest that “restrictive language policies have failed to deliver on their promise” to reduce

achievement discrepancies between ELL students and native English speakers, “and in fact may be creating new inequalities in the schools and in society.” (2010: 3)

Gándara and Hopkins say that the reason for emphasis on the increasing need for new ELL policies is due to the change of immigration policy in 1965. Since 1968, the black and Latino/a races/ethnicities have made increases of 33 and 380 percent, respectively, in public school enrollment across the nation. (2010: 9) Russell W. Rumberger and Loan Tran gathered the findings from Chapter six: “State Language Policies, School Language Practices, and the English Learner Achievement Gap.” They presented national findings by analyzing scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), as well as looking at specific data from California, Massachusetts, and Arizona, the three states with legislation implementing the SEI program. Rumberger and Tran find that “states with restrictive language policies tended to have larger achievement gaps than those without such policies...” (2010: 98) An additional study in Massachusetts in the wake of Question Two, the anti-bilingual education measure, found that drop out rates among ELL students increased significantly after the elimination of bilingual education. To continue finding whether or not this was true, this study focuses on ELL policies in Hartford, Connecticut, figuring out how the policies have changed over the years, and what types of achievement gaps, if any, are present in this city.

One important definition that tends to vary in the different documents for ELL students throughout the country is bilingual education. For the purposes of this study, bilingual education will be defined from the official document eliminating all bilingual education in Arizona. Proposition 203, states “bilingual education is a language

acquisition process for students in which much or all instruction, textbook, or teaching materials are in the child's native language other than English." (Wright, 2005:669) In this study of ELL policy legislation in the United States: Wayne E. Wright's (2005) "The Political Spectacle of Arizona's Proposition 203", he "describes and analyzes the creation, interpretation, and implementation of Proposition 203." (2005,663) Wright's opinion of the elimination of bilingual education in Arizona is extreme in its skepticism of the proposition as well as its lack of understanding of the meaning of bilingual education. Just some of Wright's arguments in the study of Prop 203 are that the language is symbolic, it casts political actors as leaders, enemies and allies plotting their actions, and it has democratic participation as an illusion. (2005:669) Wright uses data collection and analysis to "determine the meanings policies have for policy actors and other stakeholders..." (2005: 665) Wright notes,

"...It is doubtful that the harmful effects Proposition 203 and other policies are having on ELL students can be hidden for long. As widespread academic failure of ELL students becomes more apparent, policy makers may be reminded that bilingual education programs were created in the first place to address this very issue." (2005: 691)

Although in Hartford there has been absolutely no elimination of bilingual education in the school systems, these two policies in California and Arizona are pivotal in understanding where some influential ideas for current policies and practices originate from in Hartford. *Aquí Me Quedo*, a book written by Ruth Glasser (1997), is a history of Puerto Ricans in Connecticut. It also looked at bilingual education and ELL education in Connecticut where there were very high numbers of immigrants that spoke languages other than English. It also mentions the influx of these immigrants into the city of Hartford in the 1950's and 60's. (Glasser, 1997: 133) Glasser continues to state that for

decades Puerto Ricans who came to Hartford knowing only Spanish have been struggling to get “bicultural teachers, counselors and other personnel into schools.” (1997: 165)

Glasser also makes it clear that families also worked hard for bilingual education practices to be introduced in the classroom in hopes to “make the transition to life in the United States easier for their children and to help solve some longstanding cultural dilemmas.” (1997: 167) Overall, the state-mandated bilingual education program that occurred in 1977 was too controversial to continue in schools in Hartford, and the city is still grappling with the issue.

Estrada, Gomez and Ruiz-Escalante (2009) write a persuasive piece: “Let’s Make Dual Language the Norm”. These authors study a particular student, Carlos Gutierrez, and track his experience as a “first generation American whose family emigrated from Mexico.” (Estrada, Gomez, Ruiz-Escalante, 2009:54) In an era where “twenty percent of children ages 5-17 speak a language other than English at home and five percent speak English with difficulty”, the need for a progressive dual language program is more pressing than ever before. (2009:54) The focus of a progressive dual language program is that instead of waiting until the ELL students are completely proficient in English to begin working on grade-level assignments, “instead, they receive support to learn English and at the same time keep up with grade-level content in their native language.” (2009: 57) The discussion in this study of the misconceptions of ELL students can be generalized for ELL students across the nation and were discussed in administrator interviews in my study, as well.

Finally, a look at a controversial policy for ELL students in the United States is in Basurto, Wise, and Unruh’s (2006) “California School Principals’ Perceptions on the

Effects of Proposition 227.” This proposition was an act passed in California similar to the one that was passed in Arizona. With Proposition 227, “Californians voted to end bilingual education and the use of languages other than English for instruction in the public schools.” The study uncovers that that “the law passed by California voters has not changed the perceptions of California principals towards bilingual education.”

(Basurto, Wise, Unruh, 2006:99) By conducting various surveys with both open-ended, and yes or no questions, the ultimate findings indicate that the bulk of principal perceptions were in the following three categories: 21 percent of principals in 47 California school districts believe that the Proposition had a “somewhat positive effect”, 48 percent believe there was “minimal effect”, and 21 percent believed that it had a “moderate negative effect.” For the personal opinions of the principals regarding the Proposition, the majority of them at 22 percent either felt “neutral” about the elimination of bilingual education in California, and 22 percent were “somewhat opposed” to the passing of the Proposition. (2006: 102) My research question includes an understanding of policies and programs for ELL students here in Hartford. To fully answer this question, the personal interviews give another insight into these policies and how they have changed over the years. Although the surveys conducted in this study were created to find principal perceptions and my interview questions look specifically for insight on what the policies are, this study was helpful in reviewing what types of open-ended questions were used for their surveys that I could adopt and modify for my three interviews. In congruence with my studies of administrator understandings and views on the current ELL policies in Hartford through personal interviews, my research shows that to the chagrin of policy makers across the nation, the focus on English-Only instruction

did not bring about dramatic changes in academic success rates of non-English-speaking students.

My research question, as stated previously, will draw from these studies and findings to reach a higher understanding of the current legislation for ELL student policy in Hartford. These studies will also be the basis of calculating and understanding the current achievement gap between ELL and non-ELL students in Hartford.

### Methodology

My study uses mixed methods to find patterns in the way policy makers and administrators in Hartford understand ELL instruction, and how it is translating in schools. Qualitative data were obtained through personal interviews, and for this specific study I obtained three interviews total. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, IRB approval was obtained, and identities were kept anonymous for all three of three of the interviewees. One Administrator<sup>\*</sup> was interviewed for fifty-five minutes, and two public officials who currently serve on the Hartford School Board, Board Member 1<sup>+</sup>, and Board Member 2<sup>#</sup>, were interviewed for thirty-eight and twelve minutes, respectively. Appendix A has an updated list of interview questions that were used. I chose these interview participants because I was in search of responses that could be helpful regarding how the current policies for ELL students were decided, as well as how they continue to be effective in the schools. The Administrator has a very important role in decisions and understanding policy and why some schools are the way they are in her work as an ELL facilitator. She describes this role originally as an “ELL coach” which she explains to be:

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<sup>\*</sup> This administrator will remain anonymous

<sup>+</sup> This board member will remain anonymous

<sup>#</sup> This board member will remain anonymous

“To teach some courses so that teachers could get certified in other areas: either bilingual or general ed. teachers could get certified as a TSOL teacher. (Teachers of English to Students of Other Languages) And also to develop a system wide professional learning community, so that was my original role.” (Administrator 1, 2011)

Today, The Administrator’s role within the district has changed so that now she no longer works in the schools as a “coach,” but rather within the school offices working on the best possible solutions for ELL students as a “facilitator.” (Administrator 1, 2011)

Both Board Member 1 and Board Member 2 were necessary interview choices because they have responsibilities in the city where they can give input and ideas for new policy at the school board level. Board Member 1 has been involved with ELL district policy and State law changes in the past ten years, with very well-informed ideas regarding ELL support, and Board Member 2 has very specific and important responsibilities regarding policy in the Hartford district where decisions must take into account the perceptions of administrators, teachers, parents, etc.

For the quantitative data, I used online data sources such as the Connecticut Department of Education, Connecticut Mastery Test site, and the CAPT site. The data that I collected from those websites were useful in tracking achievement changes and gaps over the years. By analyzing these data sets, I was able to measure Hartford district results before and during the time when Adamowski’s policies for ELL students were in effect, which focus on learning English fluently as quickly as possible with little native language support.

### Findings

To begin the findings section, it is important to acknowledge the current ELL versus non-ELL achievement gap in Connecticut public schools. The graph in Appendix

B shows these obvious disparities from standardized tests in 2009. (Connecticut State Department of Education CEDR, 2010) For CMT math and reading, there are extreme achievement gaps between ELL students and non-ELL students, similarly for CAPT math and reading tests. Next, to provide more clarity it is important to look at the enrollment of ELL students in the Hartford public school district, as well as specific examples from a school with historically very high ELL populations. First, in the 2009-10 school year there were 3,708 total ELL students, which was a 3.6 percent decrease from the 2005-06 school year. Out of the entire Hartford public school district, that is 18.2% of the total population, and 12.4% of the state of Connecticut's ELL students. Finally, for Moylan Elementary, a unique elementary school in Hartford due to its high enrollment of ELL students, the chart in Appendix B.1 explains how the percent ELL enrollment at the school steadily decreased from the 2001 school year to the 2005 school year, where State laws and district policies that will be discussed in the next section were being introduced into the district. From 2006 until 2010 there was an average of about 23 percent ELL enrollments at Moylan. (Connecticut State Department of Education CEDR, 2010)

Through the three interviews that were conducted in my study, various “buzzwords,” or themes were introduced regarding the practices and policies for ELL students in Hartford. To begin looking at some of these similarities and questions, it is important to analyze the major policies for ELL students from around the nation. Beginning with California's Proposition 227, it is possible to pick out some of the aspects of this act that were adopted and modified to fit today's policies for ELL students in Hartford. Proposition 227 was passed into law by voters in 1998 and it specified that schools were only allowed to conduct instruction “overwhelmingly” in English. (Gándara

and Hopkins, 2010: 37) In Prop 227 ELL progress and academic achievement was measured strictly via standardized tests. With the passing of this Proposition, findings showed that there were some closings in the achievement gap between ELL students and non-ELL students, overall, they “remain consistent and substantial” as well as possibly effected by the NCLB act in 2001. (2010: 45) For grades 3, 5, 6, and 7, “ELL students showed greater achievement gains than EOs.” (2010: 40) This means that for these grades, “these results appear to be consistent with the notion that Prop 227 was beneficial for ELL students.” (2010: 40) However, for the higher-grade levels of 6 and 8, there were completely opposite trends and Prop 227 was shown to be harmful for ELL students. (2010: 41)

Moving to Arizona in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a similar Proposition began to restrict the use of native language instruction in public schools across the state. To successfully follow Proposition 203’s plan to take “appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs,” Arizona implemented English-only instruction. (Gándara and Hopkins 2010: 51) Similar to the way achievement was measured in California under Proposition 227, Proposition 203 used the SAT-9 standardized test scores to determine whether or not ELL students understood “national curriculum content standards.” (2010: 55) To understand more in-depth whether the SEI mandated program was working for ELL achievement in Arizona, researchers compiled SAT-9 score data for students in public school from 1997 to 2000, and students from 2001 to 2004. For this study, there were gains in SAT-9 test scores before and during Proposition 203, but after the Proposition had been changed so that the SAT-9 test scores were being used to determine whether or

not there would be bilingual education programs in the school, fifth and eighth grade student scores showed “dramatic deterioration in achievement.” (2010: 61) These standards of learning were determined by Arizona’s Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) test for students.

### *Policy Rules and Regulations*

There are clearly complex policies that are set in place for ELL students looking to achieve academically in Hartford’s school district. So complex, in fact, that some administrators and policy-makers that sit on the Hartford school board are not exactly clear of the various rules and regulations in place for ELL students in public schools. After having a conversation with Board Member 2, I was left wondering if I was doing research about information that does not exist in Hartford in particular. Board Member 2 told me:

“Well, the current policy is to...I mean we don't [pause] we adhere to federal and state policies. We don't have any specific additional policy other than the federal and state policies.” (Board Member 2, 2011)

I learned that the public schools in Hartford adhere to the State laws and they are not policies that were created within the district. From interviews with other district administrators, it became clear which state laws were most often discussed and focused on within the district. All of these laws were officially updated in 2000 and are stated in section 10-17f. in Chapter 164 of the CT Bilingual Education statutes. (CT Bilingual Education Statutes, 2011)

“...the one thing they're clear about is no native language instruction past 30 months. And something very interesting at the high school level, a student who comes in in the 10th grade, so less than 30 months to graduation, by state [pause] rule or policy can not, CAN NOT receive native language instruction.” (Administrator 1, 2011)

A 30-month period of time is about equivalent to three years of schooling in the U.S., which is not the ideal amount of time for a language minority student to still be receiving instruction in their native language. Board Member 1 describes the Spanish-speaking ELL students in Hartford as transnational in the following quote regarding the 30-month State law.

“...as far as the Spanish speaking community, it's a transnational community. So say that after 30 months it's English only, I think, is just subtractive. It's saying that your culture, your language, um, your ideas, don't matter, and you're going to fit in to this box that we've decided for you. It's kind of your late 19th century, early 20th century assimilation, right? It's like, you know, A plus B equals A.” (Board Member 1, 2011)

This idea of a subtractive schooling technique, or an assimilation technique emphasized by the district is looked at by various authors in the field including Angela Valenzuela's (1999) “Subtractive Schooling” as having a negative effect on the ultimate academic achievement of ELL students. Her book is an ethnographic account of her three years spent in Juan Seguín High School\* in Houston, Texas. Valenzuela recognizes that this public school in Houston was not providing opportunities for Mexican students to attain the “American Dream”, but rather it was a “large, overcrowded, and underfunded urban school [that] reproduces Mexican youth as a monolingual, English-speaking, ethnic minority...” (Valenzuela, 1999: 3) The idea of the subtractive school setting “divests these youth of important social and cultural resources, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure.” (1999: 3) By not allowing ELL students to understand and appreciate their native languages, the Hartford public school district is eliminating these students' perceptions of identity and self-worth.

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\* A pseudonym

The State law caps native language instruction for ELL students at 30 months, however there is no specification that a total of 30 months must be used to instruct ELL students in their native languages. Along with this law, there is another State law that in a school that has a group of 20 or more students in one language group, the school is dubbed by the district as a “bilingual mandated school.” This means that the school with 20 or more students of one language group is eligible to have a bilingual program of some kind in their school. This law is also stated in the previous section and chapter of the CT Bilingual Education statutes.

*State Testing for ELL students is “Absolutely Absurd”*

It is clear that within the Hartford district administration there are varying ideas of what is an effective way to test academic achievement for ELL students. My findings showed that all of the current testing is done through CMT and CAPT tests for ELL students and for non-ELL students alike.

“And, would we love to be a bilingual mandated testing state? Yeah, we believe that the way they're testing our ELLs right now, absolutely absurd. Kids who walk in the door the day before the CMT or CAPT are being given have to take the math and science. The day before. It's absolutely absurd. But, I mean, everybody, all ELL people know that this is absurd, but still we can make no headway to make changes. And the accommodations that we give ELLs are absolutely absurd.” (Administrator 1, 2011)

This opinion, though not quite as obvious, was presented in other interviews as well. An interview with Board Member 2, left me to believe that the same issues with policy and testing for ELL students in Hartford were not appropriate for the types of ELL students in Hartford:

“I think we're just now starting to see a new kind of student arrive in Hartford. Because we have a very vibrant immigrant population in Hartford and, uh, a number of refugee organizations... So they're coming here with not only no English skills, they're coming here with no education essentially in many cases...”

But I think that with this new kind of category of student, that 30 months is clearly not enough time.” (Board Member 2, 2011)

After discussing this topic in more detail with these three administrators in the district, I was shocked to find that there were not many opportunities for these individuals to give input and vote against a State law that forces all ELL students, no matter how proficient in English they are, to take standardized tests in English.

### *I Don't Know Where the Data Came From*

It was clear from many points in interviews as well as through trying to obtain numerical data for comparisons of ELL and non-ELL scores on the CMT and CAPT tests that there is a very large gap in findings regarding how ELL policy and practice has changed nationwide as well as in Hartford over the years, and in calculating the achievement gap between ELL students and non-ELL students in Hartford alone. In the first interview with Administrator 1, the response to the question of what was the reasoning behind the elimination of some dual language programs in the district was the following:

“I didn't ask, personally what the reason was, it was just not part of our reform. And there was data out there, and I can't tell you how accurate this data was, or how inaccurate it was, but I know that he made all of his decisions based on data and there was data out there that said that the dual language schools performed no better...” (Administrator 1, 2011)

This response coming from an ELL facilitator working very closely with the Hartford public school district and the State seemed questionable, however when the responses from other administrators in the district were seeming to fall in the same unknown category, it became more clear: administrators understood the change in State law to English-only instruction after a maximum of 30 months in the Hartford district. However the reasoning behind Adamowski's support for a focus on English language

instruction throughout various schools in the district was not as clearly stated, nor understood. Board Member 1 responded:

“I don't remember him [Adamowski] ever citing research although he may have said the research suggested that but I don't think he ever cited the actual research study. But I can't, I'm not trying to harp on him or anything, like I just can't remember him saying like this rigorously studied, peer reviewed, analytical study said da da da da da...I don't remember anything like that.” (Board Member 1, 2011)

Former Superintendent Adamowski's open choice reforms unexpectedly eliminated some dual language programs within the district, therefore supporting the increased focus towards English language instruction mandated by the state of Connecticut. My findings suggest that the change in State law to the requirement that after a maximum of 30 months in the district, ELL students can only receive instruction in English seems to have been inspired, in part, by Proposition 227 in California and Proposition 203 in Arizona. For both of these acts, standardized testing is the main measurement of academic achievement for ELL students and non-ELL students in the same way, and ELL students are required, after a certain period of time, to be taught only in English.

Another interesting aspect of the suggestion that the current State law is similar to the Propositions in California and Arizona is that similarly to NCLB's effect on policy in Hartford, Arizona was forced to accommodate their ELL students after the Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA) was passed in 1974. This means that for 37 years prior to Hartford's official NCLB act being passed, Arizona was already making significant changes for their ELL students in their public schools.

Finally, Board Member 2 gave some answers as to what the district was trying to accomplish with the English-focused instruction policy in the district:

“Well, I think there were two essential reasons. One was that we had a scenario where students were only receiving services in certain schools. So we were out of compliance with state policy, state law, and federal law...and also become more effective at instruction, I mean these children are not learning. Bottom line, they weren't learning. So we had to change the program in order to address those two positions that were unacceptable... He presented the plan to us and we, you know, had a chance to ask questions and give our input. But we didn't vote on the plan, no.” (Board Member 2, 2011)

This, unfortunately, still meant that administrators were not playing a significant role in the passing of these policies and State laws into practice. If they had a more significant role in doing so, based on the conversations I had with these three administrators within the district, there would be drastic changes in the way English is being pushed on to ELL students in the Hartford district.

*ELL students were going to the same schools*

Another piece of district policy information that was interesting and was also mentioned frequently throughout the three interviews was the fact that each principal of each individual school had a portion of federal money to spend in their own way. This, essentially, means that if a principal were to feel as though they needed more bilingual instruction and support for the ELL students within their school, then they could use the federal money to hire more bilingual instructors, and create a more bilingual friendly environment for their ELL students. This autonomy was discussed as a bit risky for the individual schools and the way that their students perform on the CMTs and CAPT tests. Board Member 1 explained how the individual decision-making ability of the Hartford public schools posed a potential problem in the learning abilities of their ELL students:

“And so, once the board of ed decided to change the district's policies, what it said is we're going to treat every school, um, as kind of individual programs, individual, uh, franchises in a way, cause that's kind of like the way that it's operating. And each one will be each school will be assessed based on standardized test scores. English only standardized test scores. And, uh,

particularly the proficiency rates. So once this happened, it did a couple things. It caused [pauses] schools to, um, close, so for example you have Barnard Brown, right, had the bilingual ed program there.” (Board Member 1, 2011)

This amount of autonomy granted to the principals of each school in the Hartford district eventually led to the closing of schools and the residents of Hartford blaming the administration and the district of segregating the public schools in Hartford.

One effect of the changing policies over the past decade in the Hartford public school district, was that the district was unknowingly segregating their schools with the autonomy that they were giving to the principals to choose whether or not they were going to have bilingual instruction, as well as the State’s law that in schools that have 20 or more students in one language group, that was officially a “bilingual mandated school.” Administrator 1 explained the effects of this change in the following way:

“When we started looking at where our ELLs were going, they were still pigeon-holed into the schools that we had defined as sending or receiving schools... So that meant suppose these three schools were identified as having high populations of ELLs and they were already bilingual mandated schools... So we almost created segregations within our students.” (Administrator 1, 2011)

The grouping of ELL students in only a few particular schools in the district caused issues for ELL student achievement. The schools that provided appropriate support for ELL students were closing due to the high concentration of these students.

Board Member 2 expressed the same feelings about the policy and the way that all of the ELL students began to congregate in the same schools, but he connected it back to the state’s compliance demands:

“Under the new plan yes [we’re in compliance]. Because what made us out of compliance was students would appear at school A, and there might only be ten kids at that school who needed the, that service, they say Portuguese or whatever language it was, and the principal would say you have to go to some other school. And so certain schools got into a habit of just sending kids to other schools. And that's against the law.” (Board Member 2, 2011)

It is clear from the three administrator and board member interviews that new ideas to solve the achievement gap do not always succeed. In fact, in this case as well as with other cases around the nation, it had a negative effect on ELL academic achievement because they were given the support they needed for a short period of time from a bilingual program in their school, and then the school was shut down because there were too many ELL students in one place.

*“We’re not going to teach you how to read in Spanish...”*

The final section of the findings was only discussed in the interview with Administrator 1; however, it is a significant aspect of ELL policy and how they are practiced in public schools in Hartford. The overall focus towards English fluency in schools for ELL students and not acknowledging their bilingualism is taking away an advantage that these students have over other non-ELL students in their schools. Administrator 1 made it very clear that to obtain the results that the district is looking for, specific measures must be strictly taken:

“We’re not going to teach you how to read in Spanish...we’re just not going to do that. We’re going to support native language, and we’re going to teach you how to read in English if you come in in Kindergarten, and part of the new superintendent goals are the 3rd grade promise: if you start Pre-K or Kindergarten in one of our Hartford Public Schools, our promise to you as a family is that you will be reading on grade level by third grade. Those are our new goals.”  
(Administrator 1, 2011)

The State of Connecticut’s focus on learning English only and not fostering the ELL student’s native language can be damaging to the ELL students’ sense of self as discussed in Valenzuela’s “Subtractive Schooling” (1999). Further, it is unfair to require ELL students to be tested for achievement with standardized tests in English, just as non-ELL students are assessed. I chose to focus only on the standardized test scores in the

following section because it is the one and only way the Hartford district measures academic success.

#### Analysis and Interpretation of Quantitative Data<sup>1</sup>

Some interesting statistics emerge when comparing the results from 2000, 2006 and 2011. Since in 2006 Adamowski's open choice reform was introduced in the Hartford public school district, I hypothesized that the results of the reform, such as the elimination of some dual language programs in the district, would cause a stark difference in the results from 2000 versus 2011. In each individual year, there are obvious gaps in the percentages of students who are at or above proficiency between ELL students and Non-ELL students. For example in 2006 in the CMT reading portion in Hartford, only fifteen percent of ELL students scored at or above proficiency and 34.4 percent of Non-ELL students scored at that level. That means that there is an achievement gap of 19.4 percentage points between ELL students and Non-ELL students for the reading portion of the CMT. Also, when comparing State results to Hartford results, the discrepancies are shocking. In 2011, for example, math scores showed in Hartford that only 49.5 percent performed at or above proficiency where in the state, the average was 60.1 percent. In Connecticut according to a 2009-2010 ELL Data Bulletin ELL students were a total of 5% of 563,796 students enrolled in public schools in Connecticut. (Bureau of Data Collection, 2009-10: 1-2)

The beginning of my data analysis begins with the following findings: in 2006 reading subject on the CMT had an achievement gap of 19.4 percentage point difference in at or above proficiency. In 2011, reading scores show an achievement gap of 29.4

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<sup>1</sup> All Sources from this section come from: Data Interaction, CMT (2011); Data Interaction, CAPT (2011), unless cited otherwise.

percent point difference in at or above proficiency. The achievement gap between ELL and non-ELL students has increased significantly in the past five years.

Another way to look at the achievement rates of ELL students compared to non-ELL students in Hartford based on CMT scores in 2000, 2006, and 2011 is by grade and by number level of results. These results are graded as follows: 1 means below basic, 2 is basic, 3 is proficient, 4 is at goal, and 5 is advanced. I chose the year 2000 as the starting point for analyzing the data because it was before Adamowski's reforms of school choice, the dispersion of ELL students throughout the district, and the disintegration of some dual language programs. The year 2000 was also before the State law requiring English based instruction for ELL students after a maximum of 30 months of support in the native language, and it was before the introduction of NCLB. Again, for rates of students that were "at proficiency" in their testing results, the largest discrepancies and achievement gaps between ELL students and non-ELL students were seen in reading and math. For grade 4, there was a 5-percentage point gap in the reading test between the amount of non-ELL students who scored at proficiency and the amount of ELL students who did. For grade 6, the largest achievement gaps were also seen in writing with a 9-percentage point difference between ELL students and non-ELL students. Finally, in 2000 for grade 8, the largest achievement gap between non-ELL students and ELL students was in math with a 6-percentage point difference. Across the board for math, reading, and writing subjects on the CMT in 2000, non-ELL students scored "at proficiency" more than ELL students did, which means that the achievement gap in 2000 was present.

For the CMT scores in 2006, the percentage point differences between “at proficiency” rates for ELL students versus non-ELL students increased in all subjects for all grades except for reading in grade 6. The achievement gap was at a 9-percentage point difference in 2000, and in 2006 it dropped to only a 6-percentage point difference.

For CMT scores in 2011, there were some interesting findings over the three different grade levels. In grade 4, the math and reading subject tests showed an increase in the achievement gap between ELL students and non-ELL students. The writing subject test for this grade level, however, stayed at the same rate of ELL students and non-ELL students who performed at proficiency. Similarly in grade 6, there were increases in the achievement gap in reading and math subject tests, but in the writing test in 2011, ELL students actually had a higher percentage of students who performed at proficiency than those who did who were non-ELL. Finally, for grade 8 the math proficiency rates for ELL students increased, causing the achievement gap to decrease from a 7-percentage point difference in 2006, to a 3-percentage point difference in 2011. However, for reading and writing subject tests, the achievement gap increased from 2006 to 2011, and ELL students performed much lower than non-ELL students.

When looking at CAPT scores, there were similar results with an extreme increase in the achievement gap moving from 2000 to 2011, but 2006 showed a slight closing of the gap from 2000 to 2006. CAPT testing is for tenth graders only in the state of Connecticut, so with the patterns of achievement gaps growing as the grade levels increase in the CMTs, I hypothesized that in tenth grade, the achievement gaps in these three subjects should be significantly wider than the gaps found in lower grade levels. In 2000, the highest gaps between “at proficient” scores in the CAPT tests between ELL

students and non-ELL students were in science, reading and writing with percentage point differences of 9.1, 11.1, and 9, respectively. Moving to the score results in 2006, the achievement gaps closed across the board with ELL students having a higher percentage of “at proficient” results than non-ELL students. Finally, in 2011, the gaps were the largest in math, science, and reading. For math there was a 9-percentage point difference between at proficient results for ELL students and non-ELL students. In science, the difference was 23 percentage points, for reading it was 17 percentage points, and for writing there was only a 5-percentage point difference. This means that from 2000 to 2011 there was about a 4 percent increase in the achievement gap in math, 14 percent increase in the gap in science, about a 6 percent increase for reading, and the achievement gap closed 4 percentage points in writing. The graph in Appendix C shows CMT scores and percentage point differences in achievement gaps from 2000, 2006, and 2011 for grades 4, 6, and 8, and Appendix C.1 shows the same for the CAPT scores for grade 10.

These findings show various patterns that correlate with the State’s introduction of a new law that focuses on English-only instruction in Hartford public schools after a maximum 30 months of native language support. In 2000 when this law was not in place and the Hartford district was not enforcing it as policy and was also, according to Board Member 2, considered a “typical bilingual education” district (Board Member 2, 2011), the achievement gap between ELL students and non-ELL students scoring at proficiency on the CMT was more closed than it was in 2011. This means, that overall, with the goal of the district of absolutely closing the achievement gap by using English language instruction, the achievement gap has actually become larger over time.

For final results from looking at CAPT scores both before and after the policy for ELL students focused more towards learning English, the achievement gap from 2000 to 2011 has also become larger between the ELL students and non-ELL students for three out of four of the CAPT subject tests. This means that the skills for writing for ELL students must be improving, but there was still a 5-percentage point achievement gap between ELL students and non-ELL students in 2011. Something has changed in writing skills for ELL students in the past eleven years, however there is still a significant barrier causing ELL students to fall behind non-ELL students in school achievement.

### Conclusion

My research question of how has the nature of English Language Learner policies and programs changed over the years, followed by in Hartford, how has the ELL and non-ELL student achievement gap changed, yielded results that fit my original argument. I argue that according to CMT and CAPT score data, there is an association between the emphasis on English language learning for ELL students, and the opening in the academic achievement gap between ELL students and non-ELL students. My findings, which can most easily be seen in graphs in Appendix B – C.1 explained that in the years of the Hartford public schools' emphasis on English language learning for ELL students, the percentage point difference between ELL students and non-ELL students performing at “proficiency” on the CMT and CAPT scores increased in almost all cases. I also conclude that through administrator and policy-maker interviews that the policies and practices for ELL students have changed frequently over the years, causing for confusion in understanding policy and indifference towards current legislation. By looking at Proposition 227 and 203 from California and Arizona, respectively, I further conclude

that there have been significant policy changes across the nation over time, as well. Also, some aspects of these highly controversial propositions have been adopted for the Connecticut state's current statute regarding 30-months native language instruction, and English only instruction after that. The relationship between the ELL and non-ELL achievement gaps and the emphasis on English language instruction only for ELL students is significant, however, for future researchers it would be imperative that they consider other factors, for example the effects specific to the introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, as well as current events that could have potentially indirectly caused even further differences in, and more focus on the achievement gaps. One example here could be the Sheff versus O'Neill case. I suggest that to make changes in the district, there must be a bilingual education program that can be compared to the current State law of 30-month native language instruction. If there is a program like that in Hartford, it will be important to measure the achievement gap between ELL and non-ELL students in a manner that allows an equal opportunity to succeed for all students, for example, a Spanish CMT or CAPT test for the Spanish-speaking ELL students. This would provide a better opportunity for future researchers to analyze the achievement gap between ELL students and non-ELL students in both a dual language program and today's current programs and policies in Hartford public schools.\*

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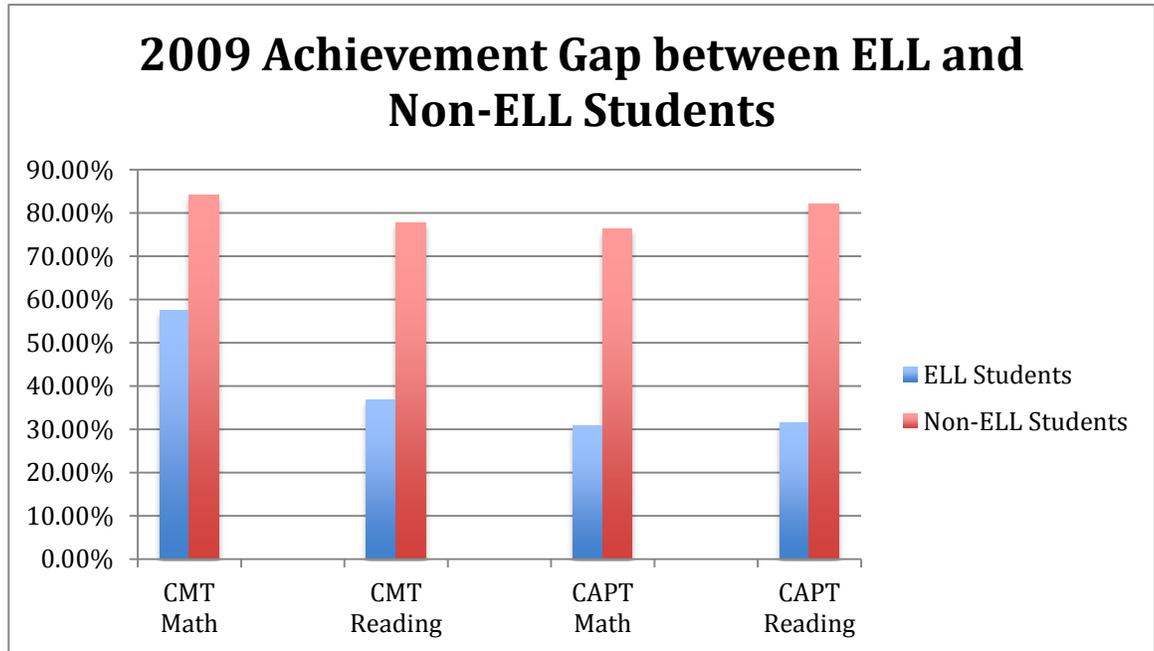
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**APPENDIX A –INTERVIEW QUESTIONS****BASIC INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. First, how long have you been a member of the HPS district? If it has been for multiple years, how often are issues of bilingual education brought up?
2. What is the current policy regarding bilingual education for English Language Learners in the Hartford Public School District?
3. Another question that I am wondering about is the current policy for bilingual education. When was the last time that this policy was updated?
- 4.
5. What are your opinions on the current policies for ELL students in Hartford schools?
6. Who is responsible for making the changes to the language in the policy?
7. When, and in what conditions is native language allowed in the classroom?
  - a. When, and in what conditions is native language not allowed in the classroom?
8. Is there any type of assessment or check-in of classrooms to make sure that the new policies are being used in the classroom?
  - a. Mention how it is often difficult to check in on teachers because they feel as though they are not being trusted to do their jobs correctly.
9. What was the reasoning behind the new policy?
10. What were the major factors that influenced the District's policy?
11. For the future, are there any discussions of reinstating any different types of bilingual instruction in classrooms?
12. What practices are commonly used by teachers to service ELL students?

\*\*Based on what I observe at the public school board meeting, I will be able to add to or change my questions above.

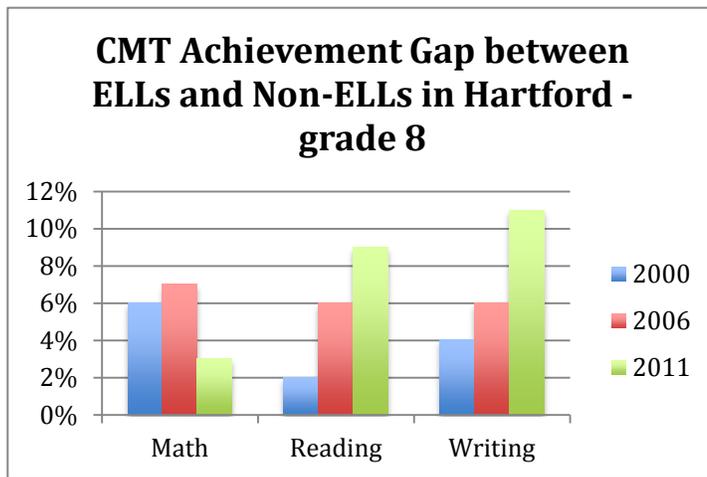
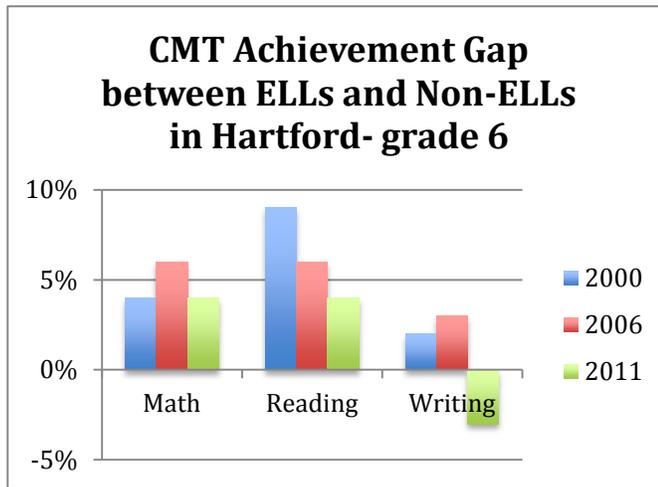
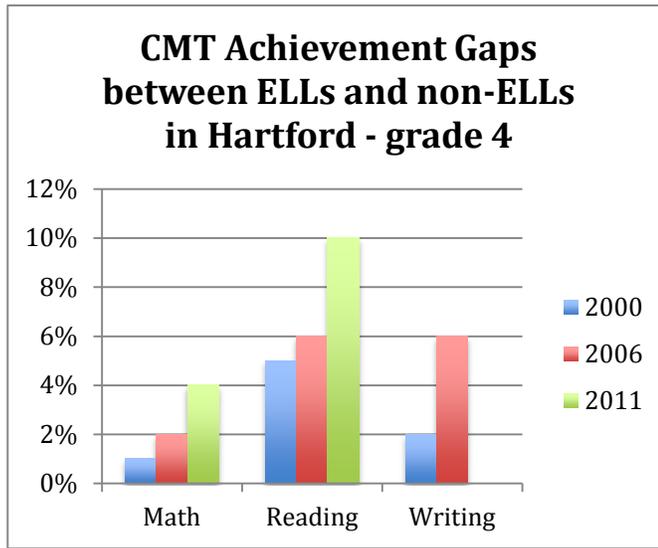
**APPENDIX B – ACHIEVEMENT GAP BETWEEN ELL AND NON-ELL STUDENTS IN 2009 IN CONNECTICUT**



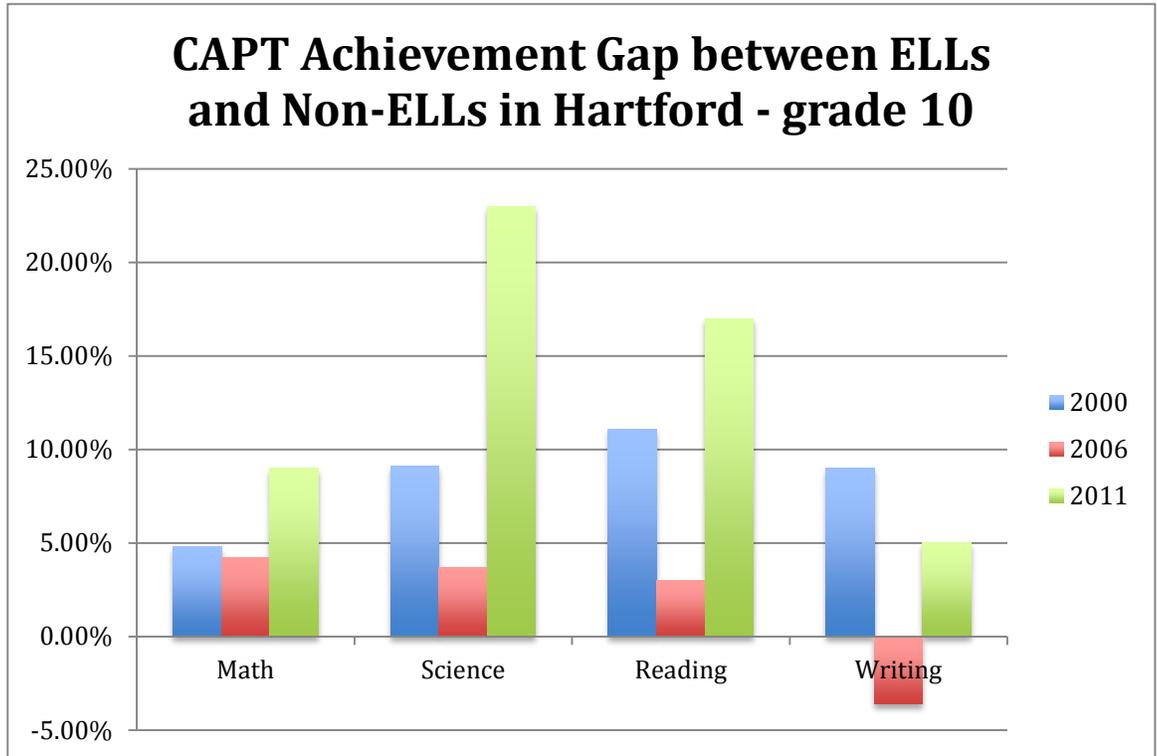
**APPENDIX B.1 – PERCENT ENROLLMENT RATES FOR MOYLAN  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

<b>School Year</b>	<b>Percent ELL Enrollment</b>
2009-10	23.1%
2008-09	20.1%
2007-08	24.1%
2006-07	23.5%
2005-06	23.8%
2004-05	17.8%
2003-04	18%
2002-03	16.4%
2001-02	26.2%

**APPENDIX C – GRADE 4, 6, AND 8 CMT ACHEIVEMENT GAP**



**APPENDIX C.1 – CAPT SCORE ACHIEVEMENT GAP**



**APPENDIX D – CMT DATA IN GRADES 4, 6, AND 8 IN 2000****DATA FROM  
2000**

	Below Basic	Basic	Proficient	Goal	Advanced
<b>GRADE 4</b>	<b>Percent of Students Tested by Level</b>				
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Math</b>					
LEP	41	23	21	14	2
Non-LEP	8	10	22	43	18
<b>Reading</b>					
LEP	75	9	9	6	1
Non-LEP	19	9	14	36	22
<b>Writing</b>					
LEP	35	29	20	14	2
Non-LEP	7	12	22	44	15
<b>GRADE 6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Math</b>					
LEP	52	17	17	11	3
Non-LEP	10	11	21	41	17
<b>Reading</b>					
LEP	79	8	3	9	1
Non-LEP	17	8	12	47	16
<b>Writing</b>					
LEP	43	23	20	12	3
Non-LEP	6	10	22	41	21
<b>GRADE 8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Math</b>					
LEP	56	19	16	8	1
Non-LEP	11	13	22	35	20
<b>Reading</b>					
LEP	78	5	9	8	0
Non-LEP	15	8	11	47	20
<b>Writing</b>					
LEP	47	29	15	9	0
Non-LEP	10	10	19	41	19

**APPENDIX D – CMT DATA IN GRADES 4, 6, AND 8 IN 2006****DATA FROM  
2006**

	Below Basic	Basic	Proficient	Goal	Advanced
<b>GRADE 4</b>	<b>Percent of Students Tested by Level</b>				
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Math</b>					
ELL	40	22	24	14	1
Non-ELL	29	20	26	21	4
<b>Reading</b>					
ELL	69	12	12	8	0
Non-ELL	46	15	18	19	1
<b>Writing</b>					
ELL	29	23	26	21	2
Non-ELL	14	22	32	28	4
<b>GRADE 6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Math</b>					
ELL	41	27	21	10	1
Non-ELL	24	21	27	22	6
<b>Reading</b>					
ELL	68	14	11	6	0
Non-ELL	34	13	17	30	6
<b>Writing</b>					
ELL	28	35	28	8	0
Non-ELL	13	22	31	27	6
<b>GRADE 8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Math</b>					
ELL	48	22	20	9	1
Non-ELL	32	21	27	17	3
<b>Reading</b>					
ELL	73	11	9	7	0
Non-ELL	36	14	15	29	7
<b>Writing</b>					
ELL	34	34	23	8	0
Non-ELL	17	21	29	26	6

**APPENDIX D – CMT DATA IN GRADES 4, 6, AND 8 IN 2011****DATA FROM  
2011**

	Below Basic	Basic	Proficient	Goal	Advanced
<b>GRADE 4</b>	<b>Percent of Students Tested by Level</b>				
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Math</b>					
ELL	35	19	26	18	2
Non-ELL	17	20	30	26	8
<b>Reading</b>					
ELL	75	13	6	6	0
Non-ELL	33	18	16	29	4
<b>Writing</b>					
ELL	25	32	32	11	0
Non-ELL	10	18	32	34	5
<b>GRADE 6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Math</b>					
ELL	33	23	24	19	0
Non-ELL	10	16	28	31	15
<b>Reading</b>					
ELL	51	21	13	14	0
Non-ELL	15	14	17	42	12
<b>Writing</b>					
ELL	21	31	34	13	1
Non-ELL	7	19	31	34	9
<b>GRADE 8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Math</b>					
ELL	46	32	17	5	1
Non-ELL	15	19	30	26	10
<b>Reading</b>					
ELL	72	14	5	8	0
Non-ELL	24	12	14	39	11
<b>Writing</b>					
ELL	62	22	13	3	0
Non-ELL	19	22	24	29	6

**APPENDIX D.1 – CAPT DATA IN 2001, 2006, AND 2011**

<b>DATA FROM 2001</b>	<b>Percent of Students Tested by Level</b>					
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	
<b>Math</b>						
ELL	37	22	27.6	9.4	3.9	
Non-ELL	10.5	12.4	32.4	24.5	20.3	<b>4.8 % difference</b> (at proficiency)
<b>Science</b>						
ELL	39.5	21.8	29	5.6	4	
Non-ELL	8.1	10.2	38.1	22.8	20.7	<b>9.1 % difference</b>
<b>Reading</b>						
ELL	44.9	21.2	24.6	6.8	2.5	
Non-ELL	7.1	14.9	35.7	20.4	21.9	<b>11.1 % difference</b>
<b>Writing</b>						
ELL	31	26.7	24.1	14.7	3.4	
Non-ELL	6	12.1	33.1	27	21.8	<b>9 % difference</b>

<b>DATA FROM 2006</b>	<b>Percent of Students Tested by Level</b>					
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	
<b>Math</b>						
ELL	31.6	30.7	27.5	6.6	3.5	
Non-ELL	7.8	13	31.7	27.1	20.4	<b>4.2 % difference</b> (at proficiency)
<b>Science</b>						
ELL	34.1	25.2	34	4.8	1.9	
Non-ELL	7.3	9.2	37.7	23.9	21.9	<b>3.7 % difference</b>
<b>Reading</b>						
ELL	31	30.1	30.5	6.2	2.2	
Non-ELL	6.4	12.5	33.5	27	20.6	<b>3 % difference</b>
<b>Writing</b>						
ELL	23.9	28.3	33	12.1	2.7	
Non-ELL	5.8	11.2	29.4	33	20.5	<b>ELLs Higher</b>

<b>DATA FROM 2011</b>	<b>Percent of Students Tested by Level</b>					
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	
<b>Math</b>						
ELL	39	31	28	3	0	
Non-ELL	18	25	37	14	6	<b>9 % difference</b> (at proficiency)
<b>Science</b>						
ELL	53	31	15	1	0	
Non-ELL	22	23	38	9	7	<b>23 % difference</b>
<b>Reading</b>						
ELL	32	33	32	3	0	
Non-ELL	11	28	49	9	3	<b>17 % difference</b>
<b>Writing</b>						
ELL	33	24	35	7	1	
Non-ELL	8	16	40	23	12	<b>5 % difference</b>