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A Mixed-Method Study: Districts' Implementation of Language Classification Policies and the Implications for Male, Hispanic, and Low-Income Middle School Students

Marcela Reyes
University of California, Irvine
United States
&
Thurston Domina
University of North Caolina
United States

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Abstract: California state policy requires English language learners (ELL) to pass the California English Language Development Test and the California Standards Test in English Language Arts to be Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP). However, most districts make it more difficult for ELL students to reclassify by setting reclassification requirements that are more stringent than the state-mandated requirement. In this paper, we examine the reclassification process for two California school districts. In Manzanita Unified School District, administrators describe a system that explicitly provides a role for parents and teachers to influence reassignment decisions. In Granada Unified School District, administrators describe a system that is exclusively test-driven. Nevertheless, these two approaches yield similar reclassification outcomes. In both districts, male, Hispanic, and low-income ELL students are less likely to take or pass the required assessments. Even among students who do pass the assessments male, Hispanic, and low-income students are

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still less likely to be reclassified. We draw upon the notion of tight- and loose-coupling in educational organizations to make sense of this disconnect between ELL reclassification policies and reclassification outcomes in these two districts. We recommend administrators and teachers work together to establish but also implement their district'sobjec language classification policies.
Keywords: English language learners; language classification policies; mixed-methods

Estudio de métodos mixtos: Implementación de políticas lingüísticas por distritos escolares y las implicaciones para los estudiantes masculino, hispanos y pobres
Resumen: La política de California exige que los estudiantes de lenguaje inglés (ELL) sean aprobados en el California English Language Development Test y en el para ser reclasificados como fluentes en inglés (RFEP). Sin embargo, la mayoría de los distritos dificultan la reclasificación de los estudiantes de ELL, estableciendo requisitos de reclasificación que son más estrictos que los requisitos obligatorios del Estado. En este artículo, examinamos el proceso de reclasificación de dos distritos escolares de California con resultados diferentes. Sin embargo, estos dos enfoques producen resultados similares de reclasificación. En ambos distritos, los estudiantes de ELL del masculino, hispanos y pobres son menos propensos a hacer las evaluaciones necesarias. Incluso entre los estudiantes que pasan en las evaluaciones, estudiantes masculino, hispanos y pobres tienen menos probabilidades de ser reclasificados. Se basan en la noción de *tight-and loose-coupling* en las organizaciones educativas para dar sentido a esa desconexión entre las políticas de reclasificación ELL y los resultados de reclasificación en esos dos distritos. Recomendamos que los administradores y los profesores trabajen juntos para establecer, pero también implementen las políticas de clasificación de lenguas del distrito.
Palabras-clave: estudiante de lenguaje inglés; políticas de clasificación de lenguas; métodos mixtos

Estudo de métodos mistos: Implementação de políticas linguísticas por distritos escolares e as implicações para estudantes do sexo masculino, hispânicos e pobres
Resumo: A política da Califórnia exige que os estudantes de linguagem inglés (ELL) sejam aprovados no California English Language Development Test e no California Standards Test in English Language Arts para serem reclassificados como fluentes em inglês (RFEP). No entanto, a maioria dos distritos dificulta a reclassificação dos estudantes de ELL, estabelecendo requisitos de reclassificação que são mais rigorosos do que os requisitos obrigatórios do Estado. Neste artigo, examinamos o processo de reclassificação de dois distritos escolares da Califórnia com resultados diferentes. No entanto, essas duas abordagens produzem resultados semelhantes de reclassificação. Em ambos os distritos, os estudantes de ELL do sexo masculino, hispânicos e de pobres são menos propensos a fazer as avaliações necessárias. Mesmo entre os estudantes que passam nas avaliações, estudantes do sexo masculino, hispânicos e de pobres têm menos probabilidade de serem reclassificados. Baseamos-nos na noção de *tight- and loose-coupling* nas organizações educacionais para dar sentido a essa desconexão entre as políticas de reclassificação ELL e os resultados de reclassificação nesses dois distritos. Recomendamos que administradores e professores trabalhem juntos para estabelecer, mas também implementem as políticas de classificação de línguas do distrito.
Palavras-chave: estudante de linguagem inglés; políticas de classificação de línguas; métodos mistos

A Mixed-Method Study: Districts' Implementation of Language Classification Policies and the Implications for Male, Hispanic, and Low-Income Middle School Students

English language learners (ELL) are students who speak another language at home and are still developing proficiency in English (Hanhnel, Wolf, Banks, & Lafors, 2014). They are one of the fastest growing student groups in the country, yet are also among the lowest performers on a broad range of educational outcomes (Maxwell, 2014). ELL students, on average, score lower than non-ELL students English reading, writing, and comprehension, as well as in less language-intensive subject areas, such as mathematics and science (Edwards, Leichty, & Wilson, 2008; Hampden-Thompson, Mulligan, Kinukawa, & Halle, 2008; Umansky, 2016). ELLs are, by definition, in the process of acquiring English proficiency, and once they reach proficiency, they leave the category. Further, widely-utilized assessments may understate ELLs' academic skills, since these assessments typically assume a baseline of fluency in English that ELLs have not yet acquired (Abedi, 2008; Robinson-Cimpian, Thompson, & Umansky, 2016). Finally, since ELL students are often segregated from non-ELL peers, they often have fewer opportunities to learn rigorous educational content than their non-ELL students (Callahan, 2005; Umansky, 2016).

In California, approximately one out of four students are classified as ELL (Hill, Weston, et al., 2014). Each school year, ELL students have the opportuntity to become Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP) and be considered English proficient. For students, a RFEP classification affects the instructional services they receive, the curriculum to which they have access, how they are assessed, and the academic standards to which they are held. California sets minimum requirements on how to determine students' English proficiency levels, but individual districts have the freedom to add more rigorous requirements (Linquanti & Cook, 2013); therefore, a student can be considered ELL in one district and RFEP in another. About 90% of California's districts set higher reclassification requirements than the state requires, making it more difficult for students to be reclassified (Hill, Betts, et al., 2014). Some districts require ELL students to pass a higher threshold on state assessments than the state requires, whereas some also consider other factors (e.g., teachers' recommendations, participation). Teachers in some districts may be limited to basing their decisions strictly on assessments, while other districts may not provide teachers with any direction (Hill, Weston, & Hayes, 2014).

This study uses data from interviews with district administrators as well as student-level administrative data to explore how two Southern California districts construct their ELL reclassification policies and, ultimately, how these policies are implemented. The districts' language classification philosophies and teachers' beliefs about individual students may affect the extent to which student demographics affect reclassification rates. Prior research shows male, Hispanic, and low-income students are more likely to be categorized as ELL than their Asian American and high-income peers in elementary school, even when accounting for their English proficiency (Halle, Hair, Wandner, McNamara, & Chien, 2012; Slama, 2014). However, it is unclear if student demographics also plays a role in the language classification of middle school students while accounting for prior achievement. Our work focuses on middle school because it is a significant schooling stage that often determines the educational foundation of adolescents' high school and college years (Walqui et al., 2010). Middle school ELL students are also less frequently studied than ELL elementary students yet they are more likely to be long-term English language learners and foreign-born children (Hahnel, Wolf, Banks, & LaFors, 2014; Olsen, 2010).

We address the following two research questions:

1) How do school districts establish language classification policies? (Qualitative)
2) What are the characteristics of ELL students who reclassify in middle school? To what extent do these characteristics vary across two districts with very different policy approaches to reassignment? (Quantitative)

First, we use data from interviews with district officials to investigate district reassignment policies, paying particular attention to understanding district administrators' rationales for setting higher language classification requirements than the state requires. Second, we use student-level administrative data to examine patterns in language reclassification among middle school students. Doing so sheds light on how districts actually implement their language classification policies, and if male, Hispanic, and low-income students are less likely to be reclassified. We focus on ELL students who have not reclassified when they enter middle school. This study will deepen our understanding of how districts establish and implement their own language classification practices, particularly for middle school students.

Literature Review

California State and District Classification Policies

During initial school registration, which usually occurs in kindergarten, California public schools administer the Home Language Survey, which asks parents whether a language other than English is spoken at home. If the answer is no, their children are classified English only. If the answer is yes, their children must take the California English Language Development Test (CELDT), which assesses their children's English proficiency. Students who pass the CELDT the first time are identified as "Initially Fluent English Proficient" (IFEP), and those who do not pass are identified as ELL students (Edwards et al., 2008). The California Department of Education requires ELL students to pass the California Standards Test in English Language Arts (CST ELA) and the CELDT in order to reclassify as RFEP. For a student to be reclassified, the Department of Education requires students to score "intermediate" or higher (at least 3 out of 5) in the listening, speaking, reading, and writing subcategories of the CELDT, "early advanced" or higher (at least 4 out of 5) overall on the CELDT, and "basic" or higher (at least 3 out of 5) on the CST ELA. Classification decision-makers can consider teacher and parent recommendations as well, but the extent to which these recommendations are incorporated depends on the district. About 90% of California's districts set even higher reclassification requirements than those set by the state. Logically, those with more stringent criteria have lower reclassification rates (Hill, Betts, et al., 2014; Hill, Weston, et al., 2014). Different test threshold requirements and different recommendation considerations can lead to a student being categorized as an ELL in one district but not in another. For example, in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), teachers' evaluations are the most highly-considered component, but in the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD), higher CST score standards are set, where students are required to score "mid-basic" on the CST and "early advanced" on at least three of the CELDT subcategories (Hill, Betts, et al., 2014). If LAUSD used SDUSD standards, 25% of their students would face delayed reclassification; inversely, if SDUSD used LAUSD standards, 70% of their students would face delayed reclassification.

The policies described changed after we completed our study. The state has updated the Home Language Survey questions and has discontinued the CST and CELDT. Later, in the discussion section, we will discuss the implications of our findings in light of the differences between the prior and current language classification policies in California.

Implementation of Policies Varies Between and Within Districts and Individuals

Although state policy articulates a set of criteria for ELL student reclassification, districts have discretion in how they approach student reclassification. As a result, some districts reclassify a relatively large proportion of ELLs, while other districts reclassify far fewer (Estrada & Wang, 2013). Different reclassification rates can be attributed to district reclassification criteria, such as teacher evaluations, parent recommendations, course grades, standard assessments, and district teachers' graded exams. Furthermore, evidence shows that reclassification rates can vary based on specific student characteristics, for example, current grade, race, age, and immigration status, as well as district characteristics, like neighborhood poverty and school funding incentives.

School level differences. Umansky and Reardon (2014) demonstrate ELL students are more likely to be reclassified at the end of a school cycle, such as in the fifth, eighth, and 11th grades had cumulative reclassification rates of 39%, 62%, and 75%, respectively; however, their sample only includes Latino students who enrolled in the district in kindergarten. In early grades, they also find more students are eligible for reclassification than are actually reclassified, while the reverse is true for middle and high school students. Evidence suggests a districts' composition can influence the reclassification rates, but the effects may differ by grade level. Further, Hahnel et al. (2014) shows that students who attend high poverty and Spanish-speaking districts are less likely to be reclassified than students who attend low poverty and where other non-English languages are predominant. Thus, the relationships between a district's composition and its reclassification rates are more variable in middle schools than elementary schools.

As previously explained, the state requires students to pass the CELDT and CST exams, and districts may add additional requirements (Hill et al., 2014). However, assessments used may have limitations in capturing student's English proficiency. Assessments may require prior content-related knowledge (such as math and science) and it may effect students scores (Abedi, 2008). Furthermore, there may be unnecessary linguistic complexity of test items that may lead to additional source or measurement error in standardized achievement tests for ELL students (Abedi, 2008, 2010). Hills et al. (2014) shows that district can also require students to pass benchmarks and acquire high GPAs in order to be reclassified. However, educators and researchers have not established if these additional requirements accurately measure student's English proficienty. These assessments limitations makes evidence of inequality in reclassification all the more striking, because in the presence of test bias estimates that come out of models with controls for test scores necessarily understate the amount of bias in the system.

Different reclassification rates can also be influenced by conflicting accountability requirements and funding incentives. Most key provisions affecting limited English proficient and immigrant students are established in Title I and Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Schools and districts have an accountability-driven incentive to keep their top performing English language learners classified as ELL students in order to have higher achievement scores meet Title I requirements (Christopher & de Alth, 2005; Slama, 2014). Schools and districts failing to make adequate progress in this area are subjected to interventions, such as allowing parents to send their children to other schools, or offering supplemental after-school programs, or to more extreme consequences, such as restructuring, or even closing the school. On the other hand, Title III incentivizes districts to reclassify students as quickly as possible to demonstrate that a greater number of their students have reached proficiency. The promise of financial gain in either keeping or reclassifying students can result in students being wrongfully classified, which, in turn, can lead to inappropriate services. Christopher and de Alth (2005, p. 50) assert "The size of Title I apportionments dwarfs those of Title III, so districts and schools face stronger incentives to hold

back high-performing English learners rather than reclassify them." Ultimately, the ELL classification has many implications for the student opportunity to learn, and unspecified methods may result in some students being unfairly placed into or excluded from ELL classification.

Student level differences. Some evidence shows that Hispanic students are overrepresented in the ELL category (Halle et al., 2012; Kohler & Lazarín, 2007). For instance, Kohler and Lazarín (2007) report first- and second-generation Hispanic students make up 58% of the total population of children of immigrants, yet they represent more than 75% of ELL students. In contrast, Asian students make up 22% of the total number of children of immigrants, but represent only 13% of ELL students (Kohler & Lazarín, 2007). Furthermore, ELL students who do not qualify for the National School Lunch Program as well as those who speak another language besides Spanish, and female students are more likely to be reclassified as RFEP (Abedi, 2008; Grissom, 2004; Slama, 2014; Thompson, 2017), but this might not always be the case when accounting for students' English proficiency (Grissom, 2004), showing students' background characteristics may predict an ELL student's reclassification probability. Yet, these studies only focus on elementary school grades, and it is uncertain if administrators make language classification decisions based on students' background characteristics, or if other, factors explain the overrepresentation of Hispanic, male, and low-income students' in the ELL category.

Prior studies have examined the language classification policies and provide descriptive reclassification rates (Abedi, 2008; Hahnel et al., 2014), others that use logistic regressions to estimate reclassification rates for subgroups of students (Halle et al., 2012; Umansky & Reardon, 2014), and others that estimate the probability of being reclassified if students passed all the measurable reclassification near the cut-off (Carlson & Knowles, 2016; Robinson, 2011; Robinson-Cimpian & Thompson, 2015). We will expand on these prior language classification research studies, and include special education, foreign-born, and students who entered the school district in grades other than kindergarten to gain a more accurate representation of ELL middle school students. Prior research studies have excluded these students (Halle et al., 2012; Robinson, 2011; Umansky & Reardon, 2014). In our study, we will focus on the rationale behind the reclassification policies and whether it lead to an overrepresentation of Hispanic, male, and low-income students' in the ELL category.

Theoretical Framework

Often researchers use socially constructed categories to compare students' academic achievements without questioning the categories themselves. Therefore, we need to investigate how educators construct their language classification categories, particularly when school districts have the freedom to establish their own language classification policies. Building on organizational models of education, school districts are "fragmented centralized" organizations, where procedures can be either tightly or loosely coupled (Fusarelli, 2002; Meyer, 1983, p. 181). In multi-layered educational systems, different actors play roles when constructing and implementing policies. As Levinson, Winstead, and Sutton (2017) explain, implementation of polices are a social practice and different actors play a role in implementing or more accurately "appropriating" language classification policies. In this case, administrators decide which factors to add and to what extent these factors should matter based on their own beliefs. Then administrators and teachers choose to what extent they will follow the set language classification policies. The process can be tightly or loosely coupled, depending on the relationship between district administrators and teachers, as well as, the awareness and acceptance of the given language classification policies.

Educational processes that are tightly coupled share four characteristics: 1) specified rules, 2) agreement on what those rules are, 3) a system of inspection to see if compliance occurs, and 4) feedback designed to improve compliance (Weick, 1982). Ideally, administrators would set fixed language classification criteria on what administrators and teachers have agreed upon. This requires discussions about their beliefs and interpretation of policies (Levinson et al., 2017). Further, administrators would evaluate how classification polices are implemented and modify their process based on their evaluation. This can determine if administrators and teachers intentions are being met. In this study, we will compare administrators' reclassification policy descriptions (qualitative analyses) and the actual application of those policies (quantitative analyses) to understand the possible disconnect between intentions and implementation. We hypothesize a disconnect in districts with a loosely coupled language classification process that prevents students from reclassifying.

Data Source and Sample

We accessed district data through the Spencer Foundation-funded Evaluating the Quality of Universal Algebra Learning (EQUAL) project. Table 1 shows the demographic breakdown of both districts, which we will describe in more detail in the quantitative section. We focused on middle school students from two diverse Southern California school districts. We chose to focus our investigation on the Manzanita Unified School District (MUSD), and the Granada Unified School District (GUSD) [pseudonyms] because they have large ELL percentages, and, more specifically, large numbers of Hispanic and Asian students. Comparing these two districts also afforded insight into practices that prevail in relatively low-income communities. The project provided qualitative data through interviews and district documents related to reclassification policies. The quantitative data included student-level demographic, language classification, transcripts, and achievement data from district administration records. We included special education, foreign-born, and students who entered the school district in grades other than kindergarten to gain a more accurate representation of ELL middle school students.

Table 1
Full Sample, Selected Sample, and Final Sample

	Full Sample		Selected Sample		Final Sample	
	MUSD	**GUSD**	**MUSD**	**GUSD**	**MUSD**	**GUSD**
District information						
Total 8th grade enrollment	16,144	7,582	4,231 (26%)	2,905 (38%)	2,969 (18%)	2,054 (27%)
Average 8th grade cohort	5,381	3,791	1,410	1,452	989	1,027
Total # of middle schools	13	10	8 (TS)	10	8 (TS)	10
Cohort Years	2010-2013 (3 cohorts)	2012-2014 (2cohorts)	2010-2013 (3cohorts)	2012-2014 (2 cohorts)	2010-2013 (3 cohorts)	2012-2014 (2 cohorts)
Student demographics in 8th grade						
% Female	49.2	49.3	45.8	44.3	47.3	45.0
% Hispanic or Latino	65.8	52.8	87.6	70.5	88.3	72.8
% Asian	12.3	34.2	9.3	28.5	8.8	26.4
% White	13.3	10.1	---	---	---	---
% African American	3.1	0.9	---	---	---	---
% Other race	5.2	1.8	2.9	0.9	2.8	0.6
% Born in United States	84.0	84.4	74.1	74.8	75.3	78.1
% Free- and Reduced-Price Lunch	71.7	72.3	90.1	88.1	90.2	88.7
% Special Education	10.1	9.8	19.7	15.4	4.6	4.2
Dependent Variable in 8th grade						
% English language learners (ELL)	22	29	72	74	65	66
% Reclassified Fluent English Speakers (RFEP)	40	45	28	26	35	34
% English Only (EO) and Initially Fluent English Speakers (IFEP)	38	26	---	---	---	---

Note. The full sample represents averages over several school years for middle school students provided by school districts. The selected sample represents 6th graders classified as English language learners (26% in Manzanita and 38% in Granada). Of these students 28% at Manzanita and 26% at Granada become RFEP by the 8th grade. The sample excludes White, African American, English Only, IFEP, and elementary RFEP, and also excludes non-traditional schools (TS). The "other race" category includes American Indian, Alaskan Native, Filipino, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islanders. The final sample includes students who have CELDT and CST scores, which are the two main California reclassification requirements.

In this mixed-methods study, we used the concurrent triangulation design (Creswell, 2013) where we collected both quantitative and qualitative data concurrently, and then compared the results to determine if there was convergence, differences, or some combination. First, we present a qualitative piece that describes the language classification policies based on interviews with district administrators. Second, we present a quantitative piece to determine how those language classification policies are applied in actuality.

Methods

Qualitative Methods

Between March and November, 2015, we interviewed three MUSD and four GUSD district administrators who were involved in the language classification process at their district. In the spring, we formally interviewed each district administrator to understand the district classification policies, and how the administrators viewed the implementation of those written policies. The formal interviews also determined the student-level data we needed for quantitative analyses. Then, during the summer months (June 2015–August 2015), we worked for both districts, and had several informal conversations with these same district administrators. Finally, between January 2016, and July 2016, we shared our qualitative and quantitative results with the district administrators and conducted more quantitative analyses based on their feedback.

Qualitative Analysis

To address the first research question, we used interviews with district administrators. The formal interviews typically lasted 30-45 minutes (see Figure 1 in the Appendix for the interview questions). We wrote shorthand notes as we conducted the interviews, and after each interview—on the same day—we edited and typed each participant's complete responses. Once the interviews were complete, the authors discussed participant's descriptions of their policies. As approved by our IRB reviewers, we did not record interviews in order to encourage administrators to speak openly about their language classification policies and keep their responses confidential.

District administrators described their job responsibilities to provide a greater understanding of how they have been involved, directly or indirectly, in classifying language minorities. Additionally, the district administrators described the language classification policies of their district. When necessary, we probed further, asking which of the following components were considered, and to what extent: the CELDT, CST ELA, ELA course grade, teacher recommendations, and parent recommendations. We also asked if they thought the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) would provide the same information as the CST scores after it replaces the CST. This was for general information only, as our quantitative analysis did not include SBAC scores; the purpose of this question was to gain greater understanding regarding future language classification policies. We assigned the seven district administrator a number to keep his/her personal responses confidential and secure.

During the summer months, we had several informal conversations with these same administrators because there was unexpected quantitative results. In these more conversational talks, they provided us with different information that included explanations for inconsistencies with the student-level data, and the implementation of the language classification process in different school years. Again we wrote shorthand notes as we had these informal conversations—on the same day—we edited and typed each participant's complete responses. The authors discussed participants responses and explanations for missing data and reclassification exceptions made for some students.

Our qualitative analysis included the formal and informal interviews and it was an on-going process to understand the complex unwritten justification of districts' language classification policies.

Quantitative Methods

In our quantitative data work, we used student-level district data to examine how language classification policies were implemented. Table 1 shows the district and student demographic information we analyzed. For the Manzanita district, the student-level data included three cohorts of eighth graders from 2010-2013, whereas, for the Granada district, it comprised two cohorts of eighth graders from 2012-2014. We selected these years because language classification policies are fluid and implemented differently in individual school years.

In MUSD, administrators were starting to consider different assessments in 2013-2014 in anticipation of the fact that the CST was not going to be available in the near future. GUSD, on the other hand, had required ELL students to pass the CELDT, the CST, and an essay exam. However, only a third of students actually took the essay exam in 2009-2011 because it was still being established. It was not until 2012-2013 that the percentage of students who took the exam increased to 85%.

Table 1 provides information on the full sample, the selected sample, and the final sample. Our analysis focused on ELL middle school students, we restricted the data to students who were classified ELL in middle school (26% in Manzanita, and 38% in Granada) and referred to this group as the "selected sample." We excluded English Only, IFEP, and students who had been reclassified RFEP in elementary school. We also excluded both White and African American students, who were mostly English Only students. We further restricted the data to students who had both CELDT and CST scores, referring to them as the "final sample." Students in the selected sample (n=4,231 in Manzanita, n=2,905 in Granada) were different from the students in the final sample (n=2,969 in Manzanita, n=2,054 in Granada). As Table 1A in the Appendix shows, in MUSD, the final sample had fewer special education, foreign-born, non-FRL, Asian American, and female students than the selected sample. Similarly, as Appendix Table 2A demonstrates, GUSD also had fewer special education, foreign-born, and Asian American students in the final sample.

Quantitative Measures

Classification. The dependent variable was coded 1 for RFEP, and 0 for ELL. Here, we first compared seventh graders who remained ELL versus those students who were reclassified RFEP in the seventh grade. Secondly, we compared eighth graders who remained ELL versus those students who were reclassified RFEP in the eighth grade.

Reclassification assessments. An ELL student had to pass all requirements with their respective different cutoff scores, depending on their district and grade level, to be reclassified. Failing to meet even one of the requirements would have been enough to prevent a student from being reclassified. The CELDT's overall raw scores and the pass cutoffs varied by school grade. For middle school students, the overall CELDT ranged from 248-741, but both districts required a score of at least 556. The CST raw scores ranged between 150 and 600, and both districts required students score at least 325, considered "mid-basic." In MUSD, according to documents, eighth graders were also required to have a cumulative GPA higher than 2.0 in a range between 0.0-4.0. In GUSD, students were also required to pass a district-wide written essay exam, scored on a scale of 1-4. A passing score was at least a 3 or higher for seventh and eighth graders.

Control variables. The models also included student-level covariates to explain differences in the students' language classification. These covariates included gender, race/ethnicity, birth country, socioeconomic status (SES), and special education status. Racial/ethnic categories included

Hispanic (reference group), Asian American, and an "other race" category, including American Indian, Alaskan Native, Filipino, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islanders. The "other" race category only included a few students; therefore, it was combined with Asian American students. The birth country was a binary outcome, where 1 was coded for those "born in the United States," and 0 was coded for those "born in another country." SES was based on students' "free or reduced lunch" (FRL) status, where students who qualified for FRL (reference group) were compared to students who did not qualify for FRL status. Special education status was binary, where 1 was coded "special education," and 0 was coded "no special education."

The models also included school-level covariates to explain differences in the students' language classification. The models included the student's current middle school (eight schools in Manzanita, and ten schools in Granada) as well as their seventh and eighth grade English teachers who were asked, to some extent, to make the final language classification decisions.

Quantitative Analysis

For each district, we conducted four logistic regression models to predict the odds that a student would be reclassified RFEP in either the seventh or eighth grade, based on that student's gender, race, and SES, while also accounting for whether they were born inside or outside of the US, had special education needs, and whether they passed the district's reclassification criteria, their cohort year, their eighth grade school, and English teacher fixed effects. This main model can be expressed as:

$$\ln\left[\frac{p\,(LC)}{1-p(LC)i}\right] = \beta_0 + \beta_1\, GEND_i + \beta_2\, RACE_i + \beta_3\, SES_i + \beta_4\, TESTS_i + \beta_5\, Controls_i + F\delta_{s(i)} + e_i \qquad \text{(F1)}$$

In (F1), $\ln\left[\frac{p\,(LC)}{1-p(LC)i}\right]$ is a variable representing student *i*'s log odds of being reclassified RFEP (reference group) in middle school. In the first two models, we compared seventh-grade RFEPs with seventh-grade ELL students for both districts separately. In the second two models, we compared eighth-grade RFEPs with eighth-grade ELL students for both districts separately. The models titled "District" include students who passed all the district's language reclassification requirements; for Manzanita, it includes CELDT, CST 325, and GPA (for 8th grade only), and for Granada it includes CELDT, CST 325, and essay. These models demonstrate the extent assessments and students' demographics explain reclassification for students who met the districts' standards. The models titled "State" include all students who passed the state's minimum requirement of 556 or higher on the CELDT and 300 or higher on the CST. These models show the extent assessments and students' demographics explain reclassification for students who met the state's minimum standards. The main analyses excludes students who did not pass the state's minimum requirements because in both districts, they had a near zero probability of reclassification.

F1 model included $GEND_i$ a dummy variable, coded 1 for female and 0 for male. $RACE_i$ includes Hispanic (reference group), Asian, and "other race." SES_i includes a student's FRL status (1=qualified for FRL, 0=did not qualify). $TESTS_i$ includes the dichotomous variable passing or failing the CST at the 325 district cutoff. In the Granada "State" models also include whether a student passed (1), failed (2), or did not have the essay scores (3). Other student-level covariates ($Controls_i$) included birth country and special education status. In addition, cohort year, current middle school, and teacher fixed effects were also included to control for annual changes and school factors that might also have explained classification.

For Granada, we expect $TESTS_i$ to be the strongest indicator of reclassification because they rely heavily on assessments. Granada's administrators describe their policies as rigid, and they expect

teachers to base reclassification on student performance. It is unlikely that Granada students who pass the state's minimum requirements, but not the district's requirements, will be reclassified. For Manzanita, we expect $TESTS_i$ to determine student reclassification to a lesser extent, because administrators, teachers, parents, and students can request exceptions. Educators unconscious biases can effect certain groups and some parents may be more inclined to request the language classification to be changed.

Qualitative Results: Districts Establish Language Classification Policies

Administrators' Descriptions of Language Classification Policies

Generally, MUSD administrators accounted for student's test scores, but they highly considered parent opinion. On the other hand, GUSD administrators based language classification more exclusively on students' test scores. Both districts conducted reclassification in the spring, but GUSD also allowed students to reclassify in the fall as well.

MUSD policies. The students who were reclassified in the spring were chosen based on that school year's CELDT scores and the prior school year's CST scores. For example, for a given seventh-grade girl, her seventh-grade CELDT and sixth-grade CST scores were used to determine her language classification status. Prior CELDT and CST scores could be used if the current scores were unavailable. Once a student's classification was determined, the parents were informed about the recommended classification. Parents could then request their child's classification be changed, regardless of their child's test scores. As the assessment administrator explained, "I meet with children's parents to see if there are other factors that can explain their English proficiency. I go on a case-by-case basis." The assessment administrator believed some students can have an off day and the assessment score may not accurately reflect their English proficiency. He described his role as essential to the reclassification process. The district's reclassification documents also specified that teachers' recommendations should also be considered, and that those should be based on a student's cumulative grade point average (GPA); however, administrators also stated the GPA criterion was not followed in practice. According to the district administrators, the final reclassification decisions were made by the parent and assessment administrator.

GUSD policies. The students were reclassified in the spring based on that current school year's CELDT, the prior school year's CST, and the essay scores. For example, for an eighth-grade girl, the school district used her eighth-grade CELDT score, seventh-grade CST score, and seventh-grade essay score. However, for an eighth grader reclassified in the fall, the district used her seventh-grade CELDT, CST, and essay scores. Thus, the CELDT was the main difference between the fall and spring. At GUSD, students were allowed to retake the CELDT throughout the year, but the CST and the essay—the more difficult tests to pass—could only be taken once each school year. The school district created the essay exam, and, at the end of each school year, all ELL and non-ELL students were required to take this exam. English Only, IFEP, and RFEP students were also required to take the essay exam in order to determine English course placements. Teachers administered the essay exam at the end of the school year around the same time they administered the CST exam. English teachers read and scored each essay based on a predetermined 1 to 4 rubric scale. District administrators trained teachers how to use the predetermined rubric. One administrator explained "administrating and scoring the district writing assessment can be labor intensive for teachers." For this reason, students were not allowed to take the essay exam on another day other than the assigned test date.

Granada's policies also permitted students' prior CELDT and CST scores to be used if their current scores were missing. According to the language director, "We want students to reclassify, so we use what we have." However, the director also stated ELL students without essay scores were considered a no pass. Administrators also recognized that the essay was the hardest requirement to pass and that most ELL and non-ELL students failed this exam. As a final step in the reclassification process, the district provided the recommended classification to the child's English teacher. According to administrators, most teachers followed the district's recommendation, especially when the student had passed all the district requirements (i.e., CELDT, CST, and written essay). Parents were then informed about their child's classification, but were not allowed to change their child's classification status.

Both districts. Administrators in both districts explained that students with disabilities and students who had been in the US for less than a year would be exempted from taking the CST. However, the districts did not collect information about when students entered the United States. A GUSD administrator explained, "this type of information can be too sensitive and controversial to collect." Furthermore, a MUSD administrator explained,

> Many of our students go back to their countries and then come back. It is complicated to determine how many years the student has actually been in this country. In some instances, students are born here, but then they move to Mexico for a few years, and later they come back.

The state of California only exempts students who have been in the US for less than one year, but the individual school districts have not collected number of years in the country or number of years moved out of the country. Based on these comments, the majority of students without the required reclassification assessments should be students with disabilities.

Similar to most California districts, MUSD and GUSD set higher language classification policies than the state requires (see Table 2). Administrators from both districts believed it essential that ELL students were not reclassified too early because, once reclassified, the student would lose language support. However, neither district provided evidence that reclassification can harm students' educational outcomes. GUSD administrators in particular were concerned that the CELDT and CST were not rigorous enough to determine English proficiency, and they therefore added the additional written essay component. However, they did not express concern the essay was created to determine course placement for non-ELL students and not necessarily to measure English proficiency, where only half of all GUSD students passed the essay exam.

These qualitative results informed us how district administrators establish their language classification policies. Next we focus on student-level district data and show how many students are reclassified that meet the minimum state and district's language classification requirements. In the discussion section, we will provide concluding remarks regarding both analyses.

Table 2
California and District Reclassification Requirements

Assessments and Other Reclassification Criteria (*Scoring Scale)*	CA Minimum Requirements	Manzanita	Granada	% of CA Districts (Hill et al., 2014)
CELDT Overall *(1-5)*	4	4	4	91% (4) 7% (5)
CELDT four subtests *(1-5)*	3	Listening/ Speaking (3) Reading/ Writing (4)	Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing (3)	65% (3) 35% (4)
CST ELA *(1-5)*	3	mid-Basic (3.5)	mid-Basic (3.5)	27% (3) 45% (3.5) 27% (4)
Essays *(1-4)*	---	---	3	9%
Teacher Recommendation	Unspecified Criteria	Yes, criteria unspecified	Yes, mainly on assessments	22% Unspecified 78% Specified Criteria
Parent Recommendation	Unspecified Criteria	Parents' opinion considered	Parents are informed	85%

Note. California sets minimum requirements that English language learners must pass in order to become RFEP, including passing the CELDT and CST ELA, and consulting parents and teachers. The CELDT and CST scores can be presented as scale and raw scores. I provided scale scores because raw scores and passing cutoffs vary by grade and subtests. For example, overall CELDT score ranges from 248-741 but passing is 556 for 7th graders and 569 for 8th graders (both equivalent to 4 on the scale). In Manzanita, parents are allowed to request their child's language classification be changed regardless of test scores, but in Granada parents are only informed about their child's language classification but they are not allowed to determine their child's classification. Furthermore, Manzanita's reclassification includes English teachers' recommendations but evaluation should be based on students' GPA where they must score higher than a 2.0+. Documentation also states English teachers can make exceptions if they believe low grades were not based on students' English proficiency. Hill et al. (2014) shows that most California districts, similar to my two districts, tend to add more reclassification requirements than the state requires.

Quantitative Results: Language Classification Policies Implemented

Middle School English Language Learners

Many language minorities were classified ELL when they started middle school, but only a few reclassified by the end of middle school. Table 1 shows that one-quarter of the Manzanita sixth graders and two-fifths of Granada sixth graders were classified as ELL. Of those, 19% and 16%, respectively, were reclassified in the seventh grade. By the eighth grade, 28% of MUSD and 26% of GUSD students were reclassified RFEP. District administrators' descriptions of their language classification policies appear straightforward. However, the student-level data shows that several students did not have all the required assessment scores, and the extent to which the policies were followed depended on the individual student's current grade level. Further, there is evidence that reclassification rates varied by gender, race, and SES.

Implementation of Language Classification Policies

First, we calculated the reclassification rates and missing scores by gender, race, SES, special education, and grade level. Males, Hispanics, students who qualify for FRL (henceforth referred to as "FRL students"), and special education students were less likely to reclassify than their counterparts (see Table 3). However, it is uncertain if these reclassification rates were lower because these students were less likely to pass the reclassification requirements, or if these students were unjustly not being reclassified. The next section demonstrates that, in some instances, student demographics strongly associated with not having the required assessments.

Table 3

Chi-Squared Test: Reclassification Rates by Gender, Race, SES, and Special Education

Manzanita	7th Grade (*n*=4,231)	8th Grade (*n*=3,430)
	RFEP %	RFEP %
Male	16***	11*
Female	22***	13*
Hispanic	17***	10***
Asian	31***	30***
Other	32***	23***
FRL	18***	11***
non-FRL	31***	21***
Special Edu.	01***	02***
Non-Special Edu.	23***	15***
Total	19	12
Granada	7th Grade (*n*=2,905)	8th Grade (*n*=2,455)
	RFEP%	RFEP%
Male	14***	12+
Female	18***	14+
Hispanic	12***	12
Asian	23***	14
Other	26***	10
FRL	15*	12*
non-FRL	20	16*
Special Edu.	03***	02***
Non-Special Edu.	18***	15***
Total	16	13

Note. For each district, I ran four separate chi-square tests to determine if reclassification rates differed by student's demographics + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. In both districts, males, Hispanic, FRL, and special education students are less likely to be reclassified. The 8th grade data only includes students who did not reclassify in 7th grade.

Missing reclassification requirements. Not having the required scores preclude students from being reclassified. ELL students were more likely to be missing reclassification criteria than RFEP students. For example, in MUSD, only 64% of ELL seventh graders had both CELDT and CST scores, compared with 95% of RFEP students. This rate was comparable at GUSD. Missing essay scores by school and classroom were comparable. Specific schools or teachers were not opting out of offering the required exams. The percentage of GUSD students not having all the required scores did not greatly change if we only considered the CELDT and CST exams. The percentage of students with and without all the required assessments did not change when excluding special

education and foreign-born students. There was no obvious trend why ELL students were more likely than RFEP students to be missing the required exams, but this prevents students from reclassification.

A Pearson chi-square test showed Manzanita's male, Hispanic, and special education students were less likely to have all required scores. In Granada, male, Hispanic, "other" race, and special education students were less likely to have all the required scores (Pearson chi-square analysis available upon request). For both districts, these results were similar for eighth graders. Though the California Department of Education has excused students with severe disabilities and students who have been in the country less than one year, the exemption of the required tests seemed to go beyond these specific exemptions. Next we ran logistic regressions that accounted for students' special education status, country born, cohort, and school fixed effects. In Manzanita, seventh-grade females and Asian American were more likely than their male and Hispanic peers to be missing one or all reclassification criteria in the logistic models with control variables (see Table 1A in the Appendix). In Granada, in both grades, Asian American, foreign-born, and special education students were more likely than Hispanic, U.S. born, and non-special education students to be missing one or all of the reclassification criteria (see Table 2A in the Appendix). The gender and race differences wavered when control variables were added, showing that the gender and race differences occur through different mechanisms.

Passing district's reclassification requirements. Moreover, passing the districts' required exams did not guarantee reclassification. About 70% of Manzanita's students who passed CELDT and CST at 325 were reclassified. A few exceptions were made where 10% of students who passed the CELDT and the CST at the 300 cutoff were also reclassified. In comparison, 94% of Granada students were reclassified who passed the CELDT, CST, and essay. Exceptions were also made where 10% of students who met the state's minimum requirements (CELDT 556, CST 300) were reclassified, but most of these students passed the essay. In both districts, educators believe that some students need to remain classified ELL even when they passed their more stringent assessment requirement but there are a few exceptions. The following analyses will demonstrate whether students' demographics played a role when educators used their discretion in keeping students classified ELL when they passed the district's or state's minimum requirements.

Odds ratios of reclassifying in MUSD. Next we focused on students who passed the district's higher requirements (n=1,043) and accounted for students' demographics, current middle school, and teacher fixed effects. From these students, Table 4 Model 1 demonstrates, in Manzanita, seventh-grade females were more likely to be reclassified RFEP (OR 1.78, $p < .001$). Further, in seventh-grade, Hispanic students were less likely to be reclassified RFEP (OR .49, $p < .001$) than non-Hispanic students. FRL students were also less likely to be reclassified (OR 0.58, $p < .01$) than non-FRL students. Lastly, several schools were more likely to reclassify students than other schools. The results remained the same when Model 2 included students who passed the state's minimum requirements (n=1,612). Female, non-Hispanic, and non-FRL students were more likely to be reclassified if the model included all students who met the minimum state requirements. School differences also persisted. On the other hand, students' demographics did not increase eighth graders' odds to reclassify when the models included students who met the district's requirements (Model 3), or when it included students who met the state's requirements (Model 4). Only a few schools' differences persisted in eighth grade. Fewer exceptions were made for eighth graders who met the state's 300 CST and not the district's 325 CST requirement, which can explain why student's demographics did not associate with reclassification.

Table 4
Odd Ratios of Reclassifying for MUSD Students who passed the District's and State's Minimum Requirements

	7th Graders		8th Graders	
	(1) District	(2) State	(3) District	(4) State
Female	**1.78*** **	**1.68*** **	1.49	1.08
	(0.26)	**(0.23)**	(0.31)	(0.21)
Hispanic	**0.49*** **	**0.55** **	1.09	1.12
	(0.10)	**(0.11)**	(0.26)	(0.23)
FRL	**0.58** **	**0.60** **	0.77	0.82
	(0.11)	**(0.10)**	(0.25)	(0.23)
Special Educ.	0.67	0.81	0.57	0.51
	(0.39)	(0.44)	(0.25)	(0.18)
Born US	1.10	1.13	0.70*	0.72*
	(0.14)	(0.16)	(0.12)	(0.11)
CST 325†		34.10***		26.86***
		(7.50)		(6.37)
GPA			3.14***	2.65***
			(0.91)	(0.71)
School 1(Ref.)				
School 2	0.20**	0.20**	0.04***	0.04***
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.02)	(0.02)
School 3	0.44**	0.45**	0.58	0.52
	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.25)	(0.20)
School 4	0.25**	0.30**	0.41	0.42
	(0.11)	(0.13)	(0.20)	(0.21)
School 5	2.81*	3.18*	0.71	0.80
	(1.43)	(1.58)	(0.35)	(0.45)
School 6	3.30**	2.58*	0.79	0.58
	(1.49)	(1.10)	(0.34)	(0.21)
School 7	0.51	0.49*	0.43	0.36*
	(0.18)	(0.16)	(0.23)	(0.15)
School 8	0.49*	0.59	0.26	0.35
	(0.15)	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.33)
N	1043	1612	556	1119
df_m	16.00	17.00	16.00	17.00
chi2	146.59	531.18	115.78	348.91
pr2	.14	.37	.19	.35

Note. All models include cohort and teachers fixed effects. The "other" race category only included a few students; therefore, it was combined with Asian American, and this group was referred as non-Hispanic. Models 1 and 3 include students who passed the district's minimum requirements of 556 on the CELDT and 325 on the CST. MUSD made some exceptions and reclassified some students who met the states but not the district's minimum requirements. Therefore, Models 2 and 4 include students who passed the state's minimum requirements of 556 on the CELDT and 300 on the CST. †CST 325 represents whether or not the student scores 325 or higher on the CST. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Odds ratios of reclassifying in GUSD. The Granada "district" models only included students who passed the CELDT, CST, and essay (n=347 for seventh graders, n=308 for eighth graders). Table 5 in Model 1 demonstrate, in Granada, FRL students were less likely to RFEP in the seventh grade (OR 0.48, $p < .05$), although they met the district's requirements. In both grade levels, a few schools were unlikely to reclassify students even when the student passed the CELDT, CST,

Table 5 *Odd Ratios of Reclassifying for GUSD Students who passed the District's and State's Minimum Requirements*

	7th Graders		8th Graders	
	(1) District	(2) State	(3) District	(4) State
Female	0.57	**1.79*** **	0.34	**1.43** **
	(0.20)	**(0.27)**	(0.23)	**(0.18)**
Hispanic	1.21	**0.44*** **	1.43	**0.63***
	(0.65)	**(0.08)**	(1.19)	**(0.12)**
FRL	**0.48***	0.97	2.02	**1.50***
	(0.14)	(0.18)	(2.42)	**(0.29)**
Special Educ.	0.00***	0.45	0.00***	1.03
	(0.00)	(0.39)	(0.00)	(0.65)
Born US	0.53	1.17	0.52	0.86
	(0.23)	(0.25)	(0.40)	(0.19)
CST 325†		4.07***		568.21***
		(0.84)		(725.00)
Passed Essay (Ref.)				
Failed Essay		0.00***		0.03***
		(0.00)		(0.02)
No Essay		0.00***		0.00***
		(0.00)		(0.00)
School 1(Ref.)				
School 2	0.00***	0.54**	2.40	1.55
	(0.00)	(0.11)	(3.86)	(1.75)
School 3	0.71	0.15***	0.59	0.57
	(0.63)	(0.04)	(0.62)	(0.25)
School 4	0.95	0.63***	1.16	1.54
	(0.80)	(0.08)	(1.10)	(0.70)
School 5	1.01	0.34***	0.31	1.10
	(0.85)	(0.06)	(0.43)	(0.87)
School 6	0.33	0.33*	0.00***	0.45
	(0.33)	(0.18)	(0.00)	(0.22)
School 7	0.00***	0.31***	0.00***	0.58
	(0.00)	(0.10)	(0.00)	(0.26)
School 8	0.23	0.41	0.00***	0.04***
	(0.26)	(0.20)	(0.00)	(0.03)
School 9	0.00***	0.52*	0.60	1.23
	(0.00)	(0.13)	(0.92)	(0.48)
School 10	0.65	0.39***	0.00***	0.53
	(0.65)	(0.08)	(0.00)	(0.18)
N	347	1263	308	1125
df_m	16.00	19.00	16.00	20.00
chi2	3767.22	----	2276.45	2616.21
pr2	.10	.15	.15	.34

Note. All models include cohort and teachers fixed effects. The "other" race category only included a few students; therefore, it was combined with Asian American, and this group was referred as non-Hispanic. Models 1 and 3 include students who passed the district's minimum requirements of 556 on the CELDT, 325 on the CST, and 3 on the essay. GUSD reclassified some students who met the states but not the district's minimum requirements. Thus, Models 2 and 4 include students who passed the state's minimum requirements of 556 on the CELDT and 300 on the CST. †CST 325 represents if a student met the CST 325 cutoff. Students without an essay score, or who failed the essay, had a near zero probability of being reclassified. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

and essay. These schools may have requirements in addition to the districts, or very few students at these schools would pass all three requirements. Granada schools did make some exceptions for students who met the state's minimum requirements, or who passed the essay, but failed either the CELDT or CST. Thus further analyses were conducted for individuals that met the state's minimum requirements (n=1,263 for seventh graders, n=1,125 for eighth graders). The sample size more than tripled. Model 2 demonstrates, female students were more likely to be reclassified (OR 1.79, $p <$ .001) and Hispanic students were less likely to be reclassified (OR 0.44, $p <$ .001) in seventh grade. Several schools were also less likely to reclassify seventh graders who passed the state's minimum requirements. Model 4 demonstrates female and FRL students were more likely to reclassify (OR 1.43, $p <$ .01; OR 1.50, $p <$ .05), and Hispanic students were less likely to reclassify (OR 0.63, $p <$ .05) in eighth grade. Only one school was less likely to reclassify eighth graders who passed the state's minimum requirements. Models 2 and 4 included whether the student passed the CST at 325, and whether the student passed or failed the essay exam. Students without an essay score, or who failed the essay, had a near zero probability of being reclassified. To be reclassified, students had to pass the essay, even though they might have failed the CELDT or CST. Granada teachers/administrators used some discretion when students only met two of the three requirements, but this lead to different reclassification rates by gender, race, and FRL status.

Discussion

Often, researchers can attribute classification status to students' abilities rather than to the policies and human decisions that sort and resort students among ELL categories. This mixed-method study examines the formation and implementation of districts' reclassification policies using formal interviews, student-level data, and informal interviews. The study demonstrates two districts took two different approaches to reclassification based on two very different set of ideas. However, the two systems yielded very similar biases. Manzanita administrators described a system that explicitly provides a substantial role for parents and teachers to input on reassignment decisions whereas, on the other hand, Granada administrators described their language classification policies as primarily based on students' test scores. However, in both districts, assessments were gatekeepers and administrators and teachers only made exceptions for students who at least met the state's minimum requirements. In both district-chosen language classification policies reduced reclassification eligibility especially for low-income, male, and Hispanic students, despite administrators policies rational differ.

Manzanita's policy made room for teacher and parent recommendations to influence reclassification decisions, but, in most instances, ELL students had to meet the district's higher than state standards to be considered for reclassification. Conversely, Granada's policy stated that reclassification should be based mainly on assessments, but English teachers made exceptions for students who did not meet the higher CELDT or CST threshold, but passed the essay exam (that they themselves scored). The educational language classification process in both districts is thus loosely coupled, where administrators set language classification rules, but administrators and teachers have considerable discretion in the implementation of these explicit policies. Administrators in both districts were surprised by this loose coupling. In both cases, district administrators did not put in place an evaluation system to determine the compliance with their policies, and, likewise, no discussion as to how to improve the implementation process occurred. Levinson et al. (2017) recommend that actors work together in order to get the "real" interpretation and purpose behind any given educational policy.

Both districts required students score well above state-mandated CST and CELDT thresholds in order to be reclassified, reasoning that exclusive reclassification policies insure that students do not prematurely stop receiving the language resources they need. At the same time, both districts wanted to equitably determine student's language classification. Manzanita administrators claimed to make exceptions when teachers, parents, or students requested otherwise. The administrators believed that considering student classification on a case-by-case basis empowered parents and students to appropriately match students with language classification and resources. In practice, however, these exceptions were rarely made and our analyses indicated that exceptions disproportionately favor girls, Asian-American, and non-FRL English language learners; seemingly creating differential standards for reclassification by gender, ethnicity, and SES. On the other hand, Granada administrators viewed their language classification policies as equitable because they believed it was based on objective and unbiased measures of language acquisition. Nevertheless, Granada required ELL students to pass an essay exam that, in fact, most students fail, including non-ELL students. And despite the emphasis on using objective standards for reclassification, exceptions were made for female and Asian-American students who only met the lower state's minimum requirements. In both districts, a student's demographics should not have predicted language classification, yet findings show that male, Hispanic, and low-income students were less likely to reclassify.

While educators in both districts were committed to developing policies that accurately and equitably identify students who no longer need ELL services; both districts systematically failed to reclassify historically disadvantaged students. This occurred because administrator's set higher language classification than the state required but exceptions were mostly made for selected students who met the lower state requirements. Administrators or teachers were underestimating the capabilities of some language minorities based on gender, race, and SES, whereas these factors should not be part of the basis for establishing language classification. Differences persisted, even though the models accounted for special education, country born, assessment results, cohort, and middle school and teacher fixed effects. The results coincide with the work of previous researchers who demonstrated elementary school reclassification rates vary by gender and race, even after accounting for required assessments scores (Halle et al., 2012; Kohler & Lazarín, 2007). This reflects issues in our greater society, where male, Hispanic, and low-income individuals are underestimated, and so the districts reinforce and reproduce these inequalities.

Based on these findings, we recommend that administrators and teachers work together to establish and implement language classification policies with an eye toward their implications for which students are reclassified. They should discuss their beliefs and understanding about their set language classification policies. Administrators also need to evaluate how the classification policies are implemented and modify the process if their objectives are not met and why there is a tendancy toward bias in their systems. Administrators from both of our districts had good intentions but were not aware of the biases their policies created. Furthermore, administrators need to establish language classification policies based on empirical data supporting the supposition that their assessments measure English proficiency accurately. Districts need to determine if these higher requirements are the best way to measure their students' English proficiency. California allows districts to determine their own classification policies so they can meet their particular student body needs. The state does not want to set specific exams and exact cutoffs because ELL students are a diverse and complex group of students with different needs. Going forward, administrators must make more research-based decisions when it comes to setting and evaluating their language classification policies. Meaning administrators must evaluate their own language classification policies to examine different

actors interpretations and implementation of the policies that should not lead to lower reclassification rates for low-income, male, and Hispanic students.

Other issues, that administrators did not mention, could have further influenced the language classification process in these districts. The current study looked at data during the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) years of 2002-2015. With NCLB, schools and districts had an accountability-driven incentive to keep their top performing ELL students classified as ELL students in order to have higher achievement scores meet Title I requirements (Christopher & de Alth, 2005; Slama, 2014). Each school year, districts had to report their ELL students' average achievement outcomes. Keeping higher scoring students classified as ELL increased the districts' averages. Neither of the districts in this study discussed this incentive during interviews. Rather, we found that Manzanita explicitly kept qualified students who passed their own higher thresholds as ELL, while Granada implicitly kept students classified ELL because they did not pass (or did not have) the required essay exam. Granada administrators also did not show great concern that the essay exam was created to determine non-ELL English course placement: initially, the essay exam was not intended to measure English proficiency. They were aware that most students failed the exam, but they were more concerned with having more ELL students meet the requirement than questioning the exam's validity. Furthermore, neither district discussed why a score of 325 on the CST was a better indicator of English proficiency than the state's minimum requirement of 300. Additionally, for Granada, there was no discussion as to how the essay exam measured English proficiency better than the CELDT and CST exams. These omissions showed that there was no consideration whether these assessments truly measured English proficiency. Rather, the administrators were more concerned with protecting students from losing language resources without evaluating the effects of those resources on students who can potentially be English proficient.

Currently, immense federal and state changes are underway in ELL policy. Therefore, it is critical for districts to evaluate their own set language classification policies and determine if their current policies lead to unintended reclassification biases. Central language classification assessments, such as the CELDT and CST, are being replaced by the ELPAC and SBAC (Umansky et al., 2015). These changes will transform districts' classification policies and in turn, it can create new or additional barriers for ELL students to become RFEP. Furtheremore, the federal government has adopted the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which requires all schools demonstrate that they are improving the English language proficiency of their ELL students. ESSA is intended to strengthen the accountability provisions and to increase funding targeted at ELL students. The government will provide more money per ELL pupil and the districts will now have the freedom to allocate those resources as they choose, creating a greater financial incentive to keep students classified ELL. Locally, California has also implemented the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the English language development (ELD) standards, both of which are aimed at improving academic rigor in all subject areas and increasing the English language requirements for both ELL and non-ELL students. These changes provide an opportunity for educators to reconsider their policies and practices around ELL reclassification. As districts undertake this process of reconsideration and revision, it is essential that they document the biases that prior placement policies created in reassignment. Our findings suggest that in order to address these biases, districts must engage in rich discussions with diverse stakeholders about the goals of ELL assignment and the processes through which students are placed into and out of ELL categories.

Limitations

In interpreting this study's findings, we note the following empirical limitations. First, the CELDT and CST have been shown to have limitations in determining English proficiency. In particular, the CST was not originally intended to determine English proficiency, and it has been normed based on non-ELL student performance. This means that many non-ELL students do not pass the CST exam. These tests are used for this study because these are the exams required by California. However, when the state determines the new state classification policy to determine English proficiency, it must evaluate the established exams and cutoffs for each grade level. Language classification policies are being determined without any research-based evidence that the selected exams measure English proficiency, or if the set cutoffs are the best indicators that students have reached proficiency. However, assessing the best exams to determine English proficiency is beyond the scope of this paper.

A second limitation of this study is that it took place during a period when administrators were preparing to adopt the new state standards and state exams. Many were more eager to discuss the implications of the new policies. Yet, in order to research the impacts of the policies, one must first have data to test the implications. In the future we should evaluate the more current state requirements and assessments.

A third limitation is the absence of teacher and student interviews. Teachers appear to have played an essential role in making the final language classification decisions. Future research should include teacher interviews to understand their perception of their district's language classification policies. Teachers should also be asked to describe their rationale when making language classification decisions. Future researchers should also interview students. Middle school ELL students may not be informed as to how they can become reclassified. Complicated and changing reclassification criteria can make the pathway out of the ELL extremely difficult, thus placing an undue burden on students, particularly given the biased methods of entry into the system. Students may also be able to provide an explanation for not having the required CST and essay scores.

A final limitation is the lack of Individualized Education Program (IEP) information for special education students. IEP vary greatly and the specification for special education students can influence their probability of reclassification. Special education students are normally dropped from analysis (e.g., Hill, Weston, et al., 2014), but remain in our analyses due to the high representation of special education students in middle school. Many special education students are also long-term English language learners and the overlap between must be further researched, particularly in middle school, with emphasis on addressing the intersection of special education and ELL classification, especially when several of these students cannot RFEP because they may be exempted from taking the required reclassification exams.

Conclusion

Student's language classification is suppose to determine whether they should receive additional language support. Districts are given the opportunity to set their own language classification policies to best serve their ELL students. However, they must evaluate their set policies and examine how they are implemented in actuality. Both our districts took different approaches to reclassification for different reasons, but unintentionally led to similar biases. These processes can have far-reaching impacts on low-income, males, and Hispanic, and their opportunities to get ahead. The ELL classification itself can have implications on whether a student is able to access advanced courses, which, in turn, can affect their educational opportunities and achievement.

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Appendix

Appendix Figure 1

Interview Questionnaire

School and district administrators that work with ELL students particularly those that make language classification decisions.

Code # of Interviewee:_____ Date: _____

1) Please describe your job responsibilities.
    a. Probe: What role do you play with ELL students?

2) Please describe the language classification process at your district particularly for middle school students.
    a. Probe: Is the language classification processes decided at the district level? Can the process differ between schools? If so, what are those differences?
    b. Probe: Which of the following components are considered and to what extent: CELDT, ELA CST, ELA course grade, teacher recommendation, and parent recommendation.
    c. Probe: Will the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) be considered similarly to the CST when it comes to language classification? How? (Please provide details).
3) (If applicable) Based on district data it seems that Hispanic and low-income students are overrepresented in the ELL category? Can you describe why you think this may be occurring?

Appendix Table 1A

Missing Reclassification Criteria in Manzanita District (MLOGIT/ODD RATIOS)

	(1) 7th Graders	(2) 8th Graders	(3) 8th Graders	(1) 7th Graders	(2) 8th Graders	(3) 8th Graders
All Criteria Available	CELDT/CST	CELDT/CST/ GPA	CELDT/CST	CELDT/CST	CELDT/CST/ GPA	CELDT/CST
	One Criterion is Missing			**All Criteria is Missing**		
Female	1.20*	0.96	0.93	1.29*	0.97	1.47
	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.17)	(0.54)	(0.57)
Hispanic (Ref.)						
Asian	1.43*	1.65	1.87*	2.45***	0.35	0.57
	(0.26)	(0.53)	(0.60)	(0.48)	(0.24)	(0.44)
Other	1.20	0.93	1.00	2.37***	1.07	1.37
	(0.22)	(0.42)	(0.44)	(0.56)	(0.81)	(0.84)
Born in the U.S.	0.52***	0.93	0.87	0.59**	0.67	0.88
	(0.04)	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.10)	(0.42)	(0.30)
FRL	0.88	0.87	0.97	1.06	0.16***	0.24*
	(0.20)	(0.35)	(0.35)	(0.31)	(0.07)	(0.16)
Special Educ.	41.59***	29.40***	31.89***	8.37***	1.50	22.38***
	(9.33)	(5.70)	(6.00)	(2.64)	(0.66)	(9.13)
Cohort 1 (Ref.)						
Cohort 2	1.48	1.60	1.59	0.52***	0.55	0.30*
	(0.31)	(0.45)	(0.45)	(0.10)	(0.24)	(0.15)
Cohort 3	1.74**	4.47***	4.62***	0.18***	0.29	2.85**
	(0.29)	(1.46)	(1.45)	(0.05)	(0.21)	(1.15)
			N	4231	3436	3430
			df_m	6.00	6.00	6.00
			pr2	.25	.33	.33

Note. The three separate models include school fixed effects. In Model 1, the outcome are three categories for 7th graders: 1) all criteria available (reference group) means they have CELDT/CST scores, 2) one criterion is missing means they do not have the CELDT or CST scores, and 3) all criteria is missing means they do not have both the CELDT and CST scores. In Model 2, the outcome are three categories for 8th graders: 1) all criteria available (reference group) means they have CELDT/CST scores and GPA, 2) one criterion is missing means they do not have the CELDT or CST scores or GPA, and 3) all criteria is missing means they do not have both the CELDT and CST scores. In Model 3, the outcome are three categories for 8th graders: 1) all criteria available (reference group) means they have CELDT/CST scores, 2) one criterion is missing means they do not have the CELDT or CST scores, and 3) all criteria is missing means they do not have both the CELDT and CST scores. Models 1 and 3 demonstrate that Female, Asian American, and special education students are more likely to be missing one or all reclassification criteria. In the 7th grade, students born in the United States are less likely to be missing one reclassification criteria. In the 8th grade, FRL are more likely to be missing all reclassification criteria.

Appendix Table 2A
Missing Reclassification Criteria in Granada District (MLOGIT/ODD RATIOS)

	(1) 7th	(2) 7th	(3) 8th	(4) 8th	(1) 7th	(2) 7th	(3) 8th	(4) 8th
All Criteria Available	CELDT/ CST/ Essay	CELDT/ CST	CELDT/ CST/ Essay	CELDT/ CST	CELDT/ CST/ Essay	CELDT/ CST	CELDT/ CST/ Essay	CELDT/ CST
	One Criterion is Missing				**All Criteria are Missing**			
Female	1.14	1.07	1.14	1.10	1.03	1.13	0.56	0.65
	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.14)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.29)	(0.27)
Hispanic (Ref.)								
Asian	1.59*	1.43	1.55**	1.30	2.04**	2.13***	3.29*	3.09***
	(0.34)	(0.32)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.47)	(0.48)	(1.71)	(1.01)
Other	1.26	1.14	3.24	3.95	3.02	3.53*	11.52	9.23
	(1.02)	(0.96)	(2.39)	(2.87)	(2.32)	(2.09)	(16.79)	(12.97)
Born in the U.S.	0.36***	0.40***	0.41***	0.45***	0.27***	0.40***	1.46	3.61
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(1.33)	(2.50)
FRL	1.08	0.98	0.91	0.90	0.89	0.74	0.36*	0.52
	(0.24)	(0.26)	(0.22)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.24)	(0.18)	(0.25)
Special Educ.	23.39***	31.86***	25.55***	26.74***	6.03**	5.52***	44.77***	15.12***
	(5.54)	(7.21)	(6.51)	(6.23)	(3.32)	(2.70)	(34.27)	(8.24)
Cohort	1.18	1.22	1.05	0.93	1.35***	1.28**	4.48	1.92**
	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(3.98)	(0.48)
N					2905	2905	2455	2455
df_m					7.00	7.00	7.00	7.00
pr2					.17	.19	.23	.23

Note. The four separate models include school fixed effects. Models 1 and 2 represents 7th graders, and Models 3 and 4 represents 8th graders. In Models 1 and 3, all criteria available means CELDT, CST, and essay scores; in Models 2 and 4, all criteria available means CELDT and CST. Asian American, foreign-born, and special education students are more likely to have missing one reclassification or all reclassification criteria in both grade levels.

About the Authors

Marcela Reyes
University of California, Irvine
marcelrm@uci.edu
Dr. Reyes is a postdoctoral scholar for the Center for Creating Opportunities for Disadvantaged Students. The Center brings together interdisciplinary faculty to improve opportunities for children living in poverty. She investigates the sociological factors (e.g., opportunities to learn, educational policy) that contribute to students' achievement and college readiness. Her research has been published in *Youth and Society*, and *Learning and Individual Differences.*

Thurston Domina
University of North Carolina
tdomina@email.unc.edu
Thurston Domina is Associate Professor of Educational Policy and Sociology at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. His research seeks to better understand the relationship between education and social inequality in the contemporary US, particularly the role organizations play in student transitions from middle and high school into higher education.

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