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# English Proficiency Associated with the High School Grades of LEP Students in Abilene ISD

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, immigration into the U.S. has increased because of growing economic problems around the world. Economic globalization and technological developments (internet access and the ability to move massive amounts of information and people in a short amount of time) have influenced the number of those seeking asylum. Accordingly, the U.S. school system continues to see an increase in students who are culturally diverse with greater educational deficiencies and limited English proficiency (LEP). In Texas there has been a 90% increase in the number of immigrants from 1990 to 2010 (National CE). This means that currently immigrants make up 14.4% of the total population of the state (see Table 2). Texas has the second largest population of LEP students and graduate students less than half the national average (39% versus 78%) (MPI, 2010). As the numbers suggest, school systems across the country are placed in a situation where these increased numbers must be educated at a higher cost with no increase to their revenue. In particular, AISD has one of the most daunting educational challenges in the region. The question that this work will attempt to answer is *to what extent has AISD met those challenges over the past five years.*

The research will be a quantitative design using an exploratory analysis using pre-existing data of the AISD LEP program and general student rates compared to the state overall numbers. All data is free of individual information and reviewable from public websites. All results are based on the information obtained and no additional

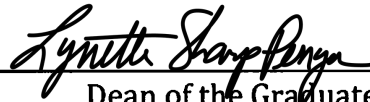
interpretations are added to increase or decrease the averages obtained from the data provided.

Initial findings from the data obtained show a rate difference in graduation rates between LEP students and general students in the AISD system as well as the Texas system. These rates are not comparable in differences but are consistent with the general rate being higher than the LEP rate. The results of the finding do indicate a high need for future research.

Key words: AISD, ESSA, ESL, Immigrants, LEP, Migration, NCLB, STARR,  
TEA, TELPAS

This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Council of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Masters of Science in Social Work



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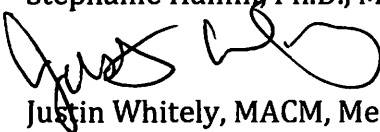
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English Proficiency Associated with the High School Grades of LEP Students in Abilene

ISD

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

Historically, U.S. teachers have dealt with a more educated immigrant population than exists in their classrooms today (Valdez, 2011). In recent years, immigration into the U.S. has increased because of growing economic problems around the world. Economic globalization (in which the rise and fall in markets in one country affect the economy of other countries and if one country defaults on its debt it has an immediate effect on other countries) and technological developments (internet access and the ability to move massive amounts of information and people in a short amount of time) have influenced the number of those seeking asylum. Political unrest, war, and conflict have influenced these numbers as well. Upon arrival, immigrant families are often impoverished, with all the attendant physical and mental health issues, as well as significant educational challenges. Accordingly, the U.S. school system continues to see an increase in students who are culturally diverse with greater educational deficiencies and lower English-speaking ability.

Unlike other countries there is no national school system. The U.S. education system is run by individual states. The most recent statistics available suggest that the demands resulting from immigration and migration have increased the average cost of an individual student's education by approximately 30% in the past five years alone (Faltis, 2011). This increased cost is partially due to the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2001), which mandated states to produce programs that address the issues faced

by immigrants and refugees but did not provide the financial support to make that possible. School districts have to develop responsible ways to fund additional requirements by NCLB in order to provide required services that educate limited English proficient (LEP) students prior to their admittance to schools.

According to August, McCardle, and Shanahan (2014), between 1990 and 2010 the number of LEP students grew by 32% in the U.S. while regular enrollment grew by only 4.9%. The Migration Policy Institute (2016) found approximately 9% (25.2 million) of the U.S. immigrant population aged five and older had limited proficiency in English and needed language instruction. Six states (i.e., California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey) represent the largest concentration of LEP individuals in the U.S. and account for 28% of that population (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Top States for Number and Share of LEP Residents, 2010*

Rank	State	LEP Population (thousands)	Share of Total U.S. LEP Population (percent)
1	California	6,898	27.3
2	Texas	3,359	13.3
3	New York	2,458	9.7
4	Florida	2,112	8.4
5	Illinois	1,158	4.6
6	New Jersey	1,031	4.1

Source: Authors' tabulations from Census Bureau 2010 ACS, Table B 16001, "Language Spoken at Home by Ability to Speak English for the Population 5 Years and Over," available through American FactFinder at <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>.

In Texas there has been a 90% increase in the number of immigrants from 1990 to 2010 (National CE). This means that currently immigrants make up 14.4% of the total population of the state (see Table 2). Texas has the second largest population of LEP

students with over 800,000. Information provided by National Center for Education Statistics reports that in Texas more than 10% of public school system dropouts were LEP students. In addition, the rate of LEP students' graduation from high school in Texas was less than half the national average (39% versus 78%, respectively) (MPI, 2010).

Table 2

*Growth in LEP Population in the Ten States with the Largest Number of LEP Individuals 2010*

Rank	State	1990 LEP Population (thousands)	2010 LEP Population (thousands)	Change from 1990 to 2010 (percent)
1	California	4,423	6,898	56.0
2	Texas	1,766	3,359	90.2
3	New York	1,766	2,458	39.2
4	Florida	961	2,112	119.7
5	Illinois	658	1,158	76.0
6	New Jersey	609	1,031	69.3
7	Arizona	276	587	112.9
8	Massachusetts	349	547	56.7
9	Georgia	109	522	378.8
10	Washington	165	512	209.7
		1990 LEP Population (thousands)	2010 LEP Population (thousands)	Change from 1990 to 2010 (percent)
United States		13,983	25,223	80.4

Source: Authors' tabulations from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2010 ACS (table B 16001, Language Spoken at Home by Ability to Speak English for the Population 5 Years and Over) available at <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml> and 1990 Decennial Census (Table 1. "Language Use and English Ability, Persons 5 Years and Over, by State") available at [www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/census/table1.txt](http://www.census.gov/hhes/socdemo/language/data/census/table1.txt)

The increase in the number of students who lack basic English speaking skills in the classroom have resulted in a decline in teachers' ability to provide needed tutelage to all members of their classes (Gonzalez, 2012). As classroom numbers increase, teachers spend more time on class discipline and less time on an education (Kramsch, 2014). This

has created a drop in attendance from both LEP students and non-LEP students due to a feeling of abandonment (Hamann, 2013). This is one reason that school systems continue to see an above-average dropout rate for immigrant students (Kim & National Center for Research on Evaluation, 2011).

The question that this work will attempt to answer is the extent to which AISD met the challenges of equally educating their LEP population in relation to their general education students over the past 5 years. The literature review will provide a look at past information and research about LEP programs. The review allowed the research to be narrowed from an overall review of the program and all the parts to how well the program in AISD provided for the students it serviced. The literature gave the researcher a look at English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) models used in the education system and the desired outcomes of those programs. The review also allowed the data information to be easily gathered and accurately judged based on standards set by the education department of the U.S. government, TEA, and AISD. All direct data information was accessed through TEA websites. Information for the literature reviewed in this article was accessed through the Abilene Christian University Library Consortium.

## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

#### **Globalization**

Per *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2016), “globalization is the act or process of globalizing; the state of being globalized; especially: the development of an increasingly integrated global economy marked especially by free trade, free flow of capital, and the tapping of cheaper foreign labor markets.” For this study, globalization will be defined as the development of world integration due to changes in technology, economic trends, and human movement causing the mingling of different cultures to increase capital gain. The requirement for a clarification of the definition exists because Webster does not fully provide the true feeling of stress brought on by the continued movement of new people of different cultures into a culture that does not want to change. To some, it has had a number of negative effects on the United States including mass immigration and the resulting decline in the quality of life and standard of living for its citizens (Rubenstein, 2011). It does mean, on a positive stance, increased dignity and worth for the individual or families that immigrate as well as an increase in feelings of security. What this has meant to the education system is more LEP students with fewer available funds for educational programs.

When Congress passed NCLB, and later replaced it with the Every Student Succeed Act (2010), they mandated services be provided to immigrant children but required states to bear the primary economic burden to provide the funding for

educational programs. The money that Congress allocated through Title 1 covers only a portion of the mandated program expenses. Additionally, Congress did not appear to have anticipated a rapidly increasing immigrant population in their original legislation. As local school districts, such as AISD, continue to see the number of LEP students increase, they also continue to see a decline in the amount of state funding due partly to unemployment, under-employment, and the broader economic recession (AISD Budget, 2015).

Half of the LEP population in Abilene, Texas are immigrants. The other half are refugees from other countries (Alfehaid, 2014). A refugee is a person or persons forced to leave their country due to war, persecution, or natural disaster, and an immigrant is a person or persons who chose to leave their country for personal reasons. As indicated in Table 3, from the U.S. State Department, the country has added over three million refugees to the population since 1975. The U.S. maintains a separate quota for both groups on an annual basis.

Over the years, the U.S. has admitted the largest number of refugees of all economically developed countries (see Table 4), over 3.2 million from 1975 to 2015 (see Table 3). The quota for refugees in 2015 was raised from 70,000 to 85,000 (MPI, 2016). Current unrest in Syria has created a large movement of refugees into the U.S.. This, and the controversy surrounding ethnic and religious issues, is part of the reason the U.S. raised the ceiling on refugees to 100,000 in 2016 (MPI, 2016). Because of the work of the IRC, certain states are targeted by the government for relocation; California and Texas receive the largest percentage of refugees (MPI, 2016). Syrian refugees will account for approximately half of the number in the California and Texas school districts' LEP

programs in the future. The IRC has 14 offices in the U.S. with the largest footprint in the states of California, with three offices, and Texas, with two offices (IRC, 2016).

Per current census data (MPI, 2016), the U.S. added almost 70,000 refugees to the population in the years 2013, 2014, and 2015. According to a *Dallas Morning News* article, Texas received over 7,200 refugees in the past year (March 22, 2016). Due to civil unrest in a number of countries, especially in Syria; these numbers are expected to continually increase over the next few years.

Table 3

*Countries Hosting Largest Number of Migrants 2005*

<b>Country</b>	<b>Number of Migrants (millions)</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Number of Migrants (millions)</b>
USA	38.4	Australia	4.1
Russian Federation	12.1	Pakistan	3.3
Germany	10.1	United Arab Emirates	3.2
Ukraine	6.8	Hong Kong, SAR China	3
France	6.5	Israel	2.7
Saudi Arabia	6.4	Italy	2.5
Canada	6.1	Kazakhstan	2.5
India	5.7	Cote d'Ivoire	2.4
United Kingdom	5.4	Jordan	2.2
Spain	4.8	Japan	2

Source: UN Population Division

### Limited English Proficient Students

Regardless of the reason, over the past decade the number of LEP students has grown by over 30% (August, McCardle, Shanahan, & Burns, 2014). This is one of the central problems the U.S. educational system will have to address (Valdez, 2011). This

change in diversity also alters the processes teachers use to successfully reach their students. Classroom teachers continue to see their time consumed with the ever-increasing demands of a multi-cultural environment. Thus, teachers tend to have an overwhelming job to provide all the individualization needed for each student to be successful (Flores & Drake, 2014). The diversity and number of students also require teachers to have the knowledge and experience to understand and adjust to the multiple cultural differences.

Table 4

*Cumulative Summary of Refugee Admissions.  
Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration December 31, 2015  
Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration  
Office of Admissions - Refugee Processing Center*

Fiscal Year	Regions (Based on the Nationality of the Principal Applicant)								
	Africa	Asia	Europe	Former Soviet Union	Kosovo	Caribbean	South Asia	PSI	Total
1975	0	135,000		6,211	0	3,000	0	0	146,158
1980	955	163,799	5,025	28,444	0	6,662	2,231	0	207,116
1985	1,951	49,962	9,233	623	0	151	5,784	0	67,704
1990	3,453	51,598	6,094	50,628	0	2,305	4,979	3,009	122,066
1995	4,827	36,987	10,070	35,951	0	7,629	4,510	0	99,974
2000	17,561	4,561	22,561	15,103	0	3,232	10,129	0	73,147
2005	20,745	12,076	11,316	0	0	6,699	2,977	0	53,813
2010	13,305	17,716	1,526	0	0	4,982	35,782	0	73,311
2015	22,472	18,469	2,363	0	0	2,050	24,579	0	69,933
Total	85,269	490,168	70,135	136,960	0	36,710	90,971	3,009	913,222

Summary of Refugee Admissions as of December 31, 2015

### Size

According to the Texas Education Agency, the largest number of LEP students in the state system are of Hispanic origin, but the largest graduating ethnic group is of Asian descent (Flores, Batalova, Fix, & Migration Policy Institute, 2012). These graduation



numbers are expected to increase over the next five years (Kim & National Center for Research on Evaluation, 2011). Current statistics indicate Texas is one of the five states with over 10% of its students in the LEP category (National Center of Education Statistics, 2015). The number of public school students served by the state of Texas in the 2013 to 2014 school year was 5,151,925, as reported by the Texas Education Agency. Of that number, an estimated one million were LEP students.

### **Status**

Initially, LEP students find themselves behind in every stage of their education as well as their social acceptance in the school neighborhood (Alfehaid, 2014). This leads to high absenteeism and an increased dropout rate for LEP students (Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig, & Heinrich, 2008). This adds to the potential for LEP students to fall further behind. For a young person who is failing to fit in, withdrawal becomes the path of least resistance. It then falls upon the teacher to find a way to get that student reconnected and find acceptable ways to keep that student engaged. LEP students become increasingly isolated, making teachers' tasks that much more daunting.

### **Cost**

LEP students have the lowest graduation rate and the highest growth rate (Table 2 shows the growth rate of the top 10 states in the nation as well as the percentage of growth) of all students in the Texas education system (MPI, 2010). The LEP student requires additional services to be successful in the school system which requires the districts to spend additional money on ESL taught students. According to TEA, Texas spent an average of \$10,578 per student per year over the last five years (Education: Texas Public Schools, 2016). The cost for an LEP student increases the budget of a

school district by \$975.00 per student. This is a conservative estimate, based on a district which must hire an ESL teacher, hire one translator, and educate a minimum of 75 LEP students (Education: Texas Public Schools, 2016). As the number of students and budget demands continue to increase, it becomes the duty of the district to find ways to control that cost. The funding cannot be placed on the federal government because of laws such as NCLB and the Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA). These laws establish a fixed amount given to school districts based on Title 1 funding, and the funding distribution does not increase if a child falls under the umbrella of LEP.

### **English Language Learning Testing**

Standardized tests add another dimension to the challenges for students and teachers. In Texas, the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) determines the placement of every LEP student in the state and is the state's answer to the federal requirements for all LEP students. The testing is used to determine where a student will be placed in the learning process. The results place a student in the immersive portion of the curriculum required to allow him or her to reach the age-appropriate grade level as fast as possible. The test-taker receives a composite score and rating only if he or she completes all four portions of the test. This score will lead to a classification of either beginner, if the composite score ranges from 1.0 to 1.4; intermediate, if the score ranges from 1.5 to 2.4; advanced, if the score ranges from 2.5 to 3.4; or advanced high, if the score ranges from 3.5 to 4.0.

Standardized tests for LEP students are in English which places a burden on the student taking the test before he or she sits down. Parents or students can request translation assistance or have questions verbally read to the student. The process of

having a non-English speaking or reading student taking a test in the English language brings the results of the prevailing tests into question (Lakin, 2012). Whereas the idea is to be able to place students where the education creates the best results, testing only satisfies the needs of the government that has mandated reporting (Bailey & Carroll, 2015). The issue presented is testing alone does not provide a clear picture of the students' needs or capabilities. However, because of a loose set of mandates by federal, state, and local requirements, testing does answer all questions the districts are required to report in order to maintain funding. Students are tested using writing, reading, speaking, and listening assessments. As with all language curricula, English as a second language (ESL) is best taught at the earliest possible time in the learning process. Therefore, a student starting in grade 8 or higher faces a harder time in mastering the language than a student starting in grades 1 through 5 (Bailey & Huang, 2011).

Testing is continuous throughout the learning process until students show mastery of the content. Added to this is the pressure of other standardized tests such as the STARR. Due to the importance states place on standardized tests, added pressure is placed on an LEP students to master the new language that will provide them acceptance in American society (Dockery, n.d). To aid in the mastery of these assessments, the STARR and other tests in this category can be given in the student's native language and the student can have additional time allotted for completion of each section. The STARR is not designed or used to measure English proficiency.

In accordance with the Texas Administrative Code (TEA, 2015) all LEP students in state public schools must be assessed by a Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) for placement and have an education plan established for the school

district at the start of each year or at entry into that school district. The LPAC has the Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness test (STAAR), the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System test (TELPAS), and the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills test (TAKS) at its disposal to complete the task (TEA, 2016). The committee reviews all documentation for each student and recommends an approval plan for progression into the mainstream school system as well as progression in the LEP program.

### **Previous Research**

Most of the research for LEP is the result of NCLB. NCLB, which was mandated by the federal government, provides standards to states for Title I funding. The federal government created a standard of higher requirements for all students believing it would cause improvement in the education of lower socioeconomic status students. NCLB tasked the states with producing assessment tests for all students in grades three through twelve. Based on the initial test, students had to show standard improvements by grade twelve. Penalties were placed on schools that did not meet minimum standards. The law added a legal requirement to states to ensure LEP students receive equal education to that of English-speaking students (TEA, 2015; Tran, 2009). One research issue is centered around demographics and English as the language of the country. The U.S. has no official language, however a large community of Spanish speakers who feel ESL is not necessary and Spanish should be equally taught and used in the school systems (Tran, 2009). Another is the number of school-aged students reported in the most recent census and data compiled by organizations such as the International Refugee Council (IRC), The Migration Policy Institute (MPI), and The League of United Latin American Citizens

(LULAC); education testing is used to place those students in the educational setting where the student is most likely to be successful.

Other research discusses the changes that have been made to satisfy NCLB requirements. The questions of how academic testing has changed to accommodate NCLB and whether the changes to the Texas process have been adequate to meet that need have been studied by a number of researchers (Menken, 2009; Polikoff, 2012; Shirvani, 2009). The states continue to receive a large percentage of funding from the federal government for education, and NCLB constitutes a major portion of that funding. Reporting becomes a contributing factor for the states to insure those funds continue to be received. In December 2015, President Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act. The Act made little to no change to the LEP provisions of NCLB.

There is wide-ranging research around testing. The research has been equally divided within the areas of legality, validity, and fairness. The legal issues have created numerous studies designed around legal and ethical issues (Ennis, 2009; Miller & Katsiyannis, 2014; Webb, 2014). NCLB gave states the ability to assess students in their native languages. All but ten states declined that option, electing to perform all assessments in English which is more stressful for the student. Validity of the assessments as well as the education process has also provided researchers with questions for study. The most common assessment question is whether the testing used by districts provides the standards required for LEP students to be placed successfully (Aguirre-Munoz et al., 2006; Young, 2008; and Young, 2009). The fairness issue is about the testing system working for students who do not already have a working knowledge of English. Research questions how a person who does not read or write English can be

accurately assessed by a test administered in English (Abedi & Levine, 2013; Chia, 2014; Young, 2008). All the research leads the reader to believe more work is needed.

There are eight different ESL program models currently in use in the U.S.: (1) ESL pullout, where students are pulled out of regular classes for instruction in the English language; (2) ESL class period, where students are grouped by proficiency and given a separate class for learning; (3) ESL resource center, where the center concentrates material in one location with a staff teacher; (4) content-based programs or structured immersion programs, where the students are provided an ESL class and immersed in mainstream classes also; (5) newer-comer programs or high intensity language training, where students receive English training for 75% of the day; (6) transitional bilingual education “early exit”, where core classes are taught in the primary language during the time English is learned; (7) developmental bilingual education “late exit”, where the students are taught at the same time in both languages; and (8) one-way dual training and two-way dual training, where students get taught through dual languages in either a one-group setting (students are grouped by the language they speak), or a two-group setting (non-English-speaking students are with English-speaking students throughout the language learning process) (Rennie & ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, W.D., 1993).

Jochum (2011) gives the impression that school districts and administrators have to take a closer look at programs and start to tailor programs to fit the students versus using a one-program-fits-all approach. He gives five stages of development which explain better how an LEP student learns and digests the addition of a new language. The

current program used in the AISD High School system, ESL class period, is a single model which includes all students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this work is to explore to what degree AISD has met the challenge of the educational needs of LEP students over the past five years. The research will examine and explore the educational needs of the LEP student; the correlation between their English language proficiency and educational success within the Abilene Independent School District (AISD); last, the effectiveness of the LEP program in comparison to the state of Texas statistics. AISD has a growing number of immigrant and refugee students in its LEP program. The number of LEP students at Abilene High School grew by 25% in the past year to a total of 62 in 2015–2016 (C.I.S., 2016). The research compares a 5-year evaluation to determine how effective the current program has been in comparison to other districts in the state of Texas. It is anticipated the findings will help AISD evaluate their services to help their LEP students achieve graduation.

## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

The research will be a quantitative design using an exploratory analysis using pre-existing data of the AISD LEP program. The school system has used the same LEP program for the last five years, and students continue to graduate at a rate of 60 to 70% below the normal graduation rate according to the TEA Federal Report Card on the AISD website (TEA, 2016). According to the AISD Lucy reporting data, the graduation rate is lower than that of the TEA Federal Report. This may be the result of a difference in reporting numbers or in reporting policies. The data analysis looks to pull all available information and data together from the TEA reports, the Lucy reports, and the TELPAS reporting to provide an accurate graduation rate. The proposed work has been determined exempt from human subject committee review by the Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A). The researcher was looking to give a simple report card of the last five years as a basis for the start of further research. The IRB approval was used to ensure that all data collection and use was in keeping with social work research protocols and standards. The researcher wanted to ensure no ethical principles and standards were violated.

### **Data**

All data has been collected from the publically available reporting system of either the TEA or AISD, the research from TELPAS and STAAR reports ranging from 2010 to 2014, as well as AISD reporting for the same years. No data was collected from



any individual either currently or previously in the LEP program. No AISD employee was required to supply any data for this collection and analysis. All TELPAS reports for the years 2010 through 2014 and TEA reporting on graduation rates for the years 2010 through 2014 can be downloaded from the TEA website. The TELPAS data are broken down by grade and by assessment, with raw data scores for all ethnic groups tested in that assessment. The Lucy data can be accessed with logins provided to the Communities in Schools coordinator via the AISD website. Lucy will provide data reports on dropout rates, attendance rates, and grades for all AISD students. No individual student or teacher information was accessed. Variables will be the dropout rate for both Texas and AISD, graduation rates for both Texas and AISD, and attendance rates for both Texas and AISD. The design of the research was a comprehensive review of existing data to produce a comparison of rates between Texas and AISD to determine an evaluation of the current LEP program in the AISD system.

### **Analysis**

Analysis was conducted using the standard mathematical computation. The researcher provided a comprehensive look at the last five years using LEP student numbers as the dependent variable. Independent variables will include assessment scores from the four areas (writing, reading, listening, and speaking) of TELPAS testing as a standard to produce an assessment for the AISD LEP program. Comparisons were made of graduation rates, dropout rates, completion rates, as well as number of students in the program.

## Results

A comparison of the mean number of high school LEP students for Abilene and other Texas school districts is found in Table 5. AISD educated approximately 50% more LEP students, on average, from 2010 to 2015 than other districts in the Texas. However, overall they made up a much smaller percentage of the student body.

Table 5

*Number of High School (9–12 Grades) LEP students from 2010 to 2015\**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>Mean # of Students per District</b>	60.0	61.0	58.0	61.0	69.0	81.0
<b>% of Students per District</b>	5.6	5.6	5.3	5.4	6.0	6.8
<b># AISD Students</b>	110.0	117.0	124.0	109.0	121.0	139.0
<b>% of AISD Students</b>	2.6	2.6	2.8	2.6	2.9	3.2

\*The Texas Assessment Management System>Analytic Portal

Table 6 is a percentage comparison of graduation rates of Texas school districts with AISD for overall and LEP students. The report shows a mean average of 5% higher graduation rates of AISD students when compared to other districts in Texas. It also shows a mean average of 9% lower LEP graduation rates for AISD when compared to the other Texas districts. However, there was significant variability from year to year with AISD LEP graduation success, especially between 2011 to 2013. A significant improvement occurred in 2014 where AISD almost doubled their graduation rate from the previous year and continued to show improvement into 2015.

A comparison of the dropout rates of the Texas school districts and AISD are found in Table 7. On average the overall dropouts for the state finds LEP students drop-out at a rate two to four times higher than other students. For AISD, the likelihood of

dropping out from school ranged from < 1% to 3% for both ESL students and overall students.

Table 6

*Texas and AISD Graduation Rates\**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>Overall %</b>	84%	86%	88%	88%	88%	89%
<b>Overall AISD %</b>	86%	93%	93%	94%	94%	90%
<b>Overall LEP Students %</b>	63%	58%	59%	67%	60%	72%
<b>AISD LEP Students %</b>	62%	30%	47%	37%	73%	77%

\* TEA > PEIMS Standard Reports Overview > PEIMS Standard Reports > Student Graduate Report

Table 7

*Texas and AISD Formal Dropout Rates\**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>Student % Overall</b>	7%	7%	6%	7%	7%	6%
<b>LEP Students %</b>	16%	24%	24%	29%	26%	15%
<b>AISD Students %</b>	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	1%
<b>AISD LEP Students %</b>	0%	3%	1%	1%	1%	1%

\* TEA > PEIMS Standard Reports Overview > PEIMS Standard Reports > Student Dropout Report

Table 8 is a comparison of students from both the state of Texas and AISD who required some form of ESL support as indicated by the TELPAS test. In every category tested (i.e. listening, reading, speaking, and writing) AISD had a higher rate of referral for ESL education than other Texas districts.

Table 9 is an ethnic breakdown of students required to take the TELPAS test in the Texas schools and in the AISD system between 2010 to 2015. This data reflects a large difference between most Texas districts and AISD in regards to Hispanic enrollment. In AISD, Hispanic students account for approximately one-third of the

number of those in the LEP program. AISD appears to have a much larger African American student population. There was no comparison for mixed races with AISD.

Table 10 is a general explanation of students who fall into the category of exclusions for purpose of state accountability. The only numbers that a school district must report to the TEA for tracking are the numbers of students who graduate, receive a GED, formally identify as a dropout, or repeatedly fail coursework. School districts are not accountable for the number of students that age out (20 years of age), are expelled, sent to a transitional school, move to another district, are home schooled, involved with the judicial system, die, or reside in a mental health treatment facility. The table shows AISD averaged approximately 265 students for whom they were not accountable for, which range from 18% to 23% yearly.

Table 8

*Texas Percentage of Need Based on the Skill Tested\**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	<b>Listening</b>					
<b>% needing ESL skill per District</b>	59%	55%	52%	51%	49%	48%
<b>AISD % needing ESL skill</b>	95%	77%	83%	77%	81%	73%
	<b>Reading</b>					
<b>% needing ESL skill per District</b>	53%	52%	48%	48%	82%	84%
<b>AISD % needing ESL skill</b>	72%	73%	61%	61%	89%	88%
	<b>Writing</b>					
<b>% needing ESL skill per District</b>	72%	71%	70%	68%	69%	66%
<b>AISD % needing ESL skill</b>	92%	89%	89%	83%	88%	82%
	<b>Speaking</b>					
<b>% needing ESL skill per District</b>	65%	63%	60%	58%	57%	56%
<b>AISD % needing ESL skill</b>	92%	83%	84%	79%	79%	78%

\*The Texas Assessment Management System>Analytic Portal

Table 9

*Texas TELPAS % by Ethnicity\**

<b>Group</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
<b>State</b>						
American Indian or Alaskan Native	19%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Asian	7%	6%	8%	6%	6%	5%
African American	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%
Hispanic	90%	87%	86%	87%	87%	88%
White	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%	2%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Two or More Races	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
<b>Abilene ISD</b>						
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Asian	26%	32%	39%	34%	33%	29%
African American	27%	39%	35%	34%	35%	39%
Hispanic	27%	25%	23%	28%	29%	31%
White	3%	2%	2%	3%	2%	1%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0%	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%

\*The Texas Assessment Management System>Analytic Portal

Table 10

 *AISD Student Annual Completion Information\**

	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
<b># of Graduating Students / Receiving GEDs</b>	919	939	969	980	920	916
<b># of Continuing Students (Repeating Coursework)</b>	74	38	39	0	24	31
<b># of Formal Dropouts</b>	52	33	24	105	25	51
<b># of Students Excluded</b>	258	277	229	280	282	202
<b>% of Excluded Students</b>	20%	22%	18%	21%	23%	17%

\*TEA> Reports and Data> School Performance> Accountability Research

Table 11 compares graduation rates reported to TEA and federal students counts. The TEA allows for exclusion of certain students, which appear to reflect more positively on this individual school district. However, the federal numbers are lower by a mean average of 2% because they do not allow for the same level of flexibility in excluding students.

Table 11

*Comparison of Federal and AISD Reported Graduation Rates*

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>AISD Reported State Graduation Rates *</b>	86%	93%	93%	94%	94%	94%
<b>AISD Reported Federal Graduation Rates**</b>	86%	90%	92%	91%	90%	90%

\* TEA > PEIMS Standard Reports Overview > PEIMS Standard Reports > Student Graduate Report

\*\* TEA> Reports and Data> School Performance> Accountability Research

## CHAPTER IV

### Discussion

The purpose of this research was to explore the educational needs of LEP students as well as examine their language proficiency and educational success within AISD. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), Texas had a 90% increase in immigration over a 20-year span from 1990 to 2010. That growth was primarily Hispanic and reflects a significant LEP challenge for Texas school districts. The TELPAS assessment is the standard used by Texas to evaluate all LEP students entering the public school system.

The TELPAS results over the years (2010 to 2015) discussed in this study has shown a marked difference in the number of AISD LEP students, on average, when compared to the rest of the state. According to Table 5, AISD has shown an average of 46% greater number of LEP students than other Texas school districts over the same timeframe (20 versus 65 respectively). This may help explain why AISD also exhibited significantly greater student limitation in areas of listening, reading, writing, and speaking. In other words, AISD students have significantly higher educational needs than most Texas districts. One possible explanation of a greater need for the LEP population between Abilene and other Texas school districts is the potential influence of the IRC. The IRC trend shows placement of families in the communities where the office is located which tends to increase student numbers on an irregular basis. Clearly, a smaller

urban area such as Abilene will see a greater influence on student needs when compared to a larger urban area.

Overall the U.S. accepted nearly 210,000 refugees from 1991 to 2003, effectively, doubling their numbers in the years 2010 to 2015 (MPI 2016). This has had a profound effect on all school districts where the IRC has relocated families with school-aged children. Such is the case for AISD, and resulted in their having a much more diverse LEP student population whom they must educate. As countries continue to experience civil unrest, this number will increase. Syria and Ukraine and their unrest places a burden on Europe and the U.S. to again increase the number of refugees that they must admit (MPI, 2016).

Support for this idea is reflected by the ethnic profile as reflected in Table 9. The diversity confronting AISD brings with it a significant set of issues not previously encountered by other school districts in the Texas. The increase in number of refugees brings with it a corresponding variety and complexity of languages. African, Asian, and Hispanic students create the bulk of the identifiable AISD LEP need, unlike other districts which are largely Hispanic. Information reported in Table 9 although appearing to contradict this fact, shows no division for the category of African. Once an African are admitted to the country they take the classification of African American for reporting purposes (TEA, 2015). This has a measurable effect on the districts due to language requirements, students identifying culture and learning skills, and communication deficits. This requires a level of teacher versatility that is almost impossible to meet.

The cultural diversity that comes when adding new and different ethnic groups to the learning environment, places teachers in a very challenging position requiring them to



learn additional communication skills. Traditionally, Spanish has always been the primary language of LEP students entering into the Texas system according to TEA reporting (2015). In the average district, 88% of the LEP students are of Hispanic descent (see Table 9). This is partly due to current migration into the U.S. from the southern borders and partly due to the language used in the homes of Hispanic Americans. From 1990 to 2010, an increase of 90% occurred in the LEP population (see Table 2). If the current rate of growth continues as predicted by August, McCardle, and Shanahan (2014) then the number of LEP students being educated by Texas could reach 50% of the regular student body in the next 10 years. Accordingly, the Hispanic number should account for most of that increase for the state of Texas.

AISD found the average number of Hispanic students declined and the average number of African American students increased during the same timeframe (The Migration Policy Institute, 2016; Alfehaid, 2014). The same could be said for the Asian American numbers (see Table 4). These wholesale differences between Abilene and other Texas districts can be fully explained by the presence of the IRC. The IRC has offices located in 14 states in the U.S. and 29 cities. Because California and Texas have more offices than other states, they are tasked with settling more refugees than other states. These numbers have a reporting effect on AISD as well because all students do not require accountability. Texas Educational Code allows for districts to educate LEP students without having to account for them in their daily reportable numbers, defining those who do not need to be accounted for as:

A student in attendance but who is not in membership for purposes of average daily attendance (i.e., students for whom school districts are not

receiving state Foundation School Program [FSP] funds); a student whose initial enrollment in a school in the United States in Grades 7 through 12 was as an unschooled refugee or asylee, as defined by TEC §39.027(a-1).

In other words, for one reporting system, their limitations as well as needs are reflected, but their numbers may not always be counted for documentation purposes. This is the ultimate ‘catch 22’. Schools are accountable for results, but are not able to request funding for the resources required to meet their needs.

With student diversity comes requirements to assess and document success. In the educational system, Texas uses the TELPAS system with four assessment grading categories (beginning, intermediate, advanced, and advanced high). According to the TELPAS Rater Manual, each of these categories except advanced high requires some form of formal ESL intervention. The assessment is administered in the learner’s native language. With the other three areas, educators assume that on average, LEP students will struggle significantly with reaching minimum standards in an open classroom setting. AISD has shown a 23% higher need than most Texas districts. With most LEP students in other districts being of Hispanic origin and having more exposure to the English language, they tend to test higher in the TELPAS. Because AISD is testing a much more diverse group, scores trend lower than those of most Texas districts. That lower testing and increased diversity will also result in driving costs higher to produce similar results compared to other Texas districts.

Cost will always factor into the education provided by a public institution. For a school system dealing with tax-payer dollars it is extremely important for the district to provide the best for the dollar spent. NCLB and ESSA do not take this into consideration when legislating requirements on the states for LEP students. The demand for acceptable

levels of achievement are clearly spelled out but the allocation of federal dollars for those same projects does not exist. This leaves the onus of payment on the state, which then passes down to the district. As discussed earlier, that is why each district has the ability to use the model of their choice when designing the program used to teach ESL to LEP students.

Table 5 shows over the 6-year span Texas districts educated 65 students per year on average, AISD showed approximately twice as many (total of 720 vs 390). In a district where 85 to 90 percent of the LEP students speak Spanish more can be provided to that student both in and out of the ESL classroom, because Spanish is as widely used as English in the state. Whereas in AISD, languages such as Swahili, Kirundi, Kinyarwanda, Rwanda, and Mandarin present unique problems individually, those problems compound when encompassed in a classroom together. AISD data indicated these students are not only taught together as a group, but are placed in mainstream classrooms where teachers have no working knowledge of languages or cultural awareness. This will have a negative influence on the graduation and dropout rates of LEP students.

The average district in Texas has a 3% lower graduation rate than AISD but a 12% higher graduation rate for LEP students. The main question is whether this discrepancy at AISD is due to its higher rate of diversity, or another less obvious reason. One of the prime jobs of the school system for migrant and refugee students is to introduce them to the U.S. culture and help them to graduate (Motti-Stefanidi, F., & Masten, A., 2013). This becomes the job of teachers as well as other students. For the Hispanic community, the task is easier because of the size of the community as well as

the increasingly more common use of the language. For other students, this can be more difficult which can lead to a higher dropout rate.

When looking at state drop-out rates, AISD has, on average, a 5% lower for non-LEP students. For LEP students that increases to over 22% higher, compared to other Texas districts. However, when graduation rates and drop-out rates are compared for an accurate assessment, the numbers do not add up. With an average graduation rate of 92% and an average drop-out rate of 1% there is a 7% rate of missing students. The number reported here indicates a number of students fall into an exclusion category, meaning the requirement to account for their graduation rate or drop-out is not mandatory for Texas districts. This category includes students who leave during the school year in a variety of different ways (expulsion, transfer to another district, withdrawal to home school, incarceration, suicide, accidental death, and so on). Table 10 reveals those numbers for the years 2010 through 2014 for AISD. This group of students produces issues for reconciliation of total numbers. Table 11 gives a general look at how exclusions affect the numbers reported to TEA verses the numbers in the classrooms.

The purpose of this research was to provide a five-year assessment of the success of the ESL program of AISD as well as to examine their language proficiency and educational success within AISD. As data were reviewed and more information gathered, it became clear to the researcher that with all information collected at this point those questions could not be answered. AISD prides itself on helping each student admitted to the district. In some conditions, LEP students are admitted without the TELPAS test being administrated prior to starting class. This places an undue burden on the district. AISD has shown great improvement in the LEP student rates over the last two years.

What does not show is whether the program has been as successful as others based on the numbers of school graduation and drop-out rates as well as graduation rates and drop-out rates of LEP students when compared to other Texas districts.

## CHAPTER V

### Conclusion

The purpose of the LEP program in a public-school system is to educate learners who do not have a working use of the English Language. Texas provides an LEP program in all its public-school districts governed by the TEA. Each district is allowed the autonomy to establish and run its program independently of the governing body. The only established norms are the reporting system. This research intended to focus on AISD and their ability to deliver adequate services to the LEP student population of Abilene. The failure of the research was due in part to the inability of the researcher to reconcile the reported numbers of LEP students in the program in any one year, a major limitation caused by the TEC reporting standards.

The statistical reporting for this program differs based on the entity to which the data is being reported. Federal reports are different from state reports in regards to the number of students in the program. What is more problematic is reporting of additions and subtractions of students at the district level. As students move from place to place for various reasons, some students are not tracked because they belong to a group of non-reportable students. This makes reconciliation of reporting limited at best which creates a statistical anomaly for reporting purposes.

The strength of the research was uncovering the work done by AISD. The district views education as the primary goal and mission of AISD staff. Therefore, they admit and educate prior to administering the TELPAS test, which is one of the requirements of

the program. Abilene has the IRC physically located in the city. The IRC admit and assist refugees without prior knowledge and those students are admitted to the school district without any prior information pertaining to education upon arrival. The majority of the students have no prior knowledge of English. The district will admit the students and assist with their education without services or funding from any government department, placing a large burden on the school district as well as the reporting of numbers.

In conclusion the research fell short of its intended goal but was able to answer a number of other questions about AISD that has proven to be very positive. AISD is a district that attempts to help, sometimes at the detriment of the tax payers of the district. However, because of the many additional factors dealing with unclear reporting numbers that were uncovered during the research, producing an answer to the stated hypothesis of providing a five-year assessment of the program was not possible.

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APPENDIX A

Abilene Christian University IRB Approval

**ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY**  
*Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World*  
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103  
325-674-2885  
05/26/2016



Donald Dolton  
Department of Social Work  
ACU Box #27866  
Abilene Christian University

Dear Mr. Dolton:

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled English proficiency associated with the high school grades of ELL students in Abilene ISD

(IRB# 16-055 ) is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects as:

- Non-research (45 CFR 46.102(d))
- Non-human research (45 CFR 46.102(f))

Based on:

Data are anonymous and available on a public database

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

*Megan Roth*

Megan Roth, Ph.D.  
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs