



Reasons Behind the Lack of Motivation and Aberrant Behaviors Among English Language Learner (ELL) Students

ABSTRACT

This report contains the findings of a qualitative study conducted at a high school in the west suburbs of Illinois. The purpose was to find out, from the perspectives of ELL/Bilingual teachers and students, the contributory grounds for the lack of motivation and aberrant behaviors among students enrolled in the program. This document also contains a series of recommendations that Dr. Ferrer believes could eliminate or at least minimize some of the challenges that the ESL/Bilingual Department is currently facing.



Wherever there is a gap, we can build a bridge...

March 25, 2009

Todd Leden, Principal
Fenton Community High School
1000 W. Green St.
Bensenville, IL 60106

Dear Principal,

I am pleased to present to you the final report of the study, *Reasons Behind the Lack of Motivation and Aberrant Behaviors Among English Language Learner (ELL) Students that took place at your school in March 2009.*

This study was conducted in order to find out, from the perspectives of ELL/Bilingual teachers and students the contributory grounds for the lack of motivation and aberrant behaviors among students enrolled in the program. This document contains 15 Emerging Study Findings and 11 Recommendations that could eliminate or at least minimize some of the challenges that the ELL/Bilingual Department is facing.

In spite of the challenges that the ELL/Bilingual Department is fronting, the students who participated in this study were gracious and collaborative and the staff demonstrated great determination to improve the quality of services provided by the department and create an environment where all ELL students can learn.

I support the efforts that you, as the principal, your leadership team and staff are making to improve the academic achievement of all students. It has been my privilege to serve you and your school. If you need any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me. The Equity and Excellence Department stands ready to serve you and your staff.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Lourdes Ferrer

Fifteen Emerging Study Findings:

1. The two greatest challenges experienced by the ESL/Bilingual teachers are the students' lack of motivation to learn and aberrant behaviors demonstrated during class and in the hallways.
2. The teachers believe that the lack of motivation and the aberrant student behaviors they are currently observing are at the highest levels ever experienced in their careers.
3. The teachers in general expressed that they feel "burnt out." They are exhausted and frustrated due to the significant amount of instructional time spent dealing with discipline problems during class.
4. According to the teachers and students, the lack of motivation to learn is caused by students:
 - Not being able to see the value of the services, they are receiving through the program.
 - Not having goals or not knowing where they are heading in life.
 - Being undocumented; therefore, lacking a reason or motivation to achieve in school.
 - Being unprepared to take high school level courses. Many were enrolled in high school solely because of their age.
 - Staying too long in the ESL/Bilingual program for not meeting the ACCESS exit criteria.
 - Feeling intimidated by students that were disruptive and interfered with the right of others to learn.
5. There was consensus among teachers and students that no more than ten to twelve students in the entire ESL/Bilingual Department were showing aberrant behaviors in their classes and in the hallways.
6. It is the teachers' and the students' belief that the "extra" efforts made, or opportunities given, by the teachers to accommodate the students' needs were not appreciated and/or being perceived as a sign of weakness.
7. According to the teachers, and students, the aberrant behaviors demonstrated in class and in the hallways by this small group of students consisted of the following:
 - Communicating (verbally and non-verbally) with teachers in a disrespectful and abusive manner
 - Intimidating (verbally and non-verbally) students who engage in the classroom learning process
 - Hitting and punching classmates during class

- Yelling, screaming, saying or doing anything to interrupt the teaching-learning process
 - Bullying or making fun of other students
 - Getting out of their seats to wander around and interrupt the class
8. There was consensus, among teachers and students, that students are more likely to disrespect non-Hispanic teachers than Hispanic teachers. According to the students, Hispanic teachers are tougher (or stricter) and fluent enough in Spanish to understand verbal and non-verbal communication that is disrespectful and/or abusive in meaning.
 9. Teachers and students expressed their beliefs that students that are being disruptive in class have a history of behaving in this manner since they were in middle school. These students consistently and overtly bragged about it in class.
 10. Both teachers and students believe that highly disruptive ELL students behave appropriately in non-ELL/Bilingual classes and/or in classes in which ELL students are not in the majority.
 11. Teachers and students stated that some of their most challenging students do not meet the criteria to receive ELL/Bilingual services. Some of these students have been receiving ELL services for a period longer than is expected because they have not met the program exit criteria (ACCESS score).
 12. There was consensus among the entire staff that unidentified learning disabilities are holding some of their most difficult students from moving out of the ELL/Bilingual program.
 13. All teachers and most students agreed that there is a lack of consistency among teachers regarding their homework expectations and procedures. The teachers perceive the current department homework policy as unfair and unproductive.
 14. All teachers and most students agreed that there is lack of consistency among teachers regarding their behavior interventions procedures. The teachers and the students perceived the current behavioral policies as unfair and ineffective.
 15. Some students expressed tremendous frustration with trying to learn in classroom environments dominated by disruptive students. Students feel that they must “go along” to “get along.” This acquiescence by the ELL high achieving students is adversely affecting their classroom participation, which minimizes their learning potential.

Eleven Recommendations:

1. **Team-Building Teacher Program:** The ESL/Bilingual teachers could go through a team-building program to promote unity and support for each other. As “it takes a village to raise a child,” it will take a unified effort to get all ESL students to reach behavioral and academic English proficiency.
2. **Administrative Rapid Response:** The school administrators should continue to pay close attention to the ESL/Bilingual staffs’ and students’ concerns and take appropriate actions to address these concerns as a priority.
3. **Further Teacher Analysis and Discussion:** The school administrators could share the findings and recommendations presented in this report with the ESL/Bilingual staff for further analysis and/or actions.
4. **Revised Homework Policy:** The ESL/Bilingual staff may well revisit their current homework policy and through consensus, revise the policy to ensure consistency and effective implementation.
5. **Revised Behavior Interventions:** Some members of the school administration and ESL/Bilingual staff could develop and implement a “Culturally Relevant Behavior Intervention Plan” that effectively addresses the negative behaviors of this specific student population and improves the learning environment for all students in the program.
6. **Students’ Focus Groups:** Some members of the school administration and ESL/Bilingual staff could meet with all the ESL students, no more than twelve at a time, to discuss the lack of motivation and aberrant behaviors challenges that the program is facing and their roles in overcoming those challenges.
7. **A Parent Meeting:** The ESL/Bilingual department should schedule a mandatory parent meeting to discuss the challenges that the program is facing and the parents’ roles in helping their children overcome these challenges.
8. **A Student Workshop:** The ESL/Bilingual department should schedule a student workshop to provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to minimize the negative impact that their undocumented status or their parents’ undocumented is having on their academic achievement.
9. **An ELL Student Database:** The administration could create an easy-to-access ESL/Bilingual student database that includes information that could improve and accelerate the decision-making process for enrollment and exiting of the program.
10. **Student Individual Education Plan:** A team of administrators and ESL/Bilingual teachers can be assembled to analyze each individual ELL student’s records and data to identify needs and determine appropriate interventions.
11. **In-School Alternative Program:** The administration could design and implement an in-school program that:

- Separates students whose behaviors are deemed too disruptive to function within their current classroom environments
- Provides services that meet their academic and behavioral needs.