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# **Bridging the Gap: Organizational Factors and Their Impact on the Postsecondary Enrollment of English Language Learners**

*Lee D. Flood*

A priority goal of the United States Department of Education in 2015 was raising completion rates of postsecondary education by implementing policies and programs to increase college access, promote seamless transitions from secondary to postsecondary education, and ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students (United States Department of Education, 2014a; 2014b). Equitable access is dependent on marginalized groups attaining postsecondary enrollment. That simple notion is the point of departure for this study.

The English Language Learner (ELL) population in the United States has grown rapidly. By 2025, approximately one out of every four students in public schools will come from a home where a language other than English is spoken (Goldenberg, 2006). ELLs consistently performed below their English-speaking peers on measures of academic achievement despite federal legislation, like No Child Left Behind (NCLB) of 2001. This legislation was specifically aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning for all students, including ELLs (Abedi, 2008; Goldenberg, 2006).

Schools have struggled to create policies that effectively address the rising population of ELL students. Further complicating the issue was the fact that ELLs are an extremely diverse group including a variety of cultures, parent's educational experiences, and socioeconomic backgrounds. ELLs speak hundreds of languages from around the globe and have been in the United States for varying amounts of time (American Youth Policy Forum, 2009).

An in-depth analysis focused solely on organizational factors and their influence on ELL's postsecondary enrollment (PSE) was missing in the literature. Comparisons between ELL and non-ELL groups examining PSE were present (Batalova, Flores & Fix, 2012; Cromley & Kanno, 2012; Kim, 2011), but do not answer what factors within this subgroup of students contributed to PSE. Student-level factors have been analyzed at length, but these factors are out of the control of the schools that ELLs attend (Cromley & Kanno, 2012). Therefore, an investigation into organizational-level factors including school-parent communication, teacher's expectations

of students, and college preparatory opportunities was pertinent.

The purpose of this study was to analyze organizational factors that contribute to postsecondary enrollment among ELL students. This study addressed the following three research questions:

- Do organizational factors related to school-parent communication contribute to PSE among ELL students?
- Do organizational factors related to high expectations from teachers contribute to PSE among ELL students?
- Do organizational factors related to college preparatory opportunities contribute to PSE among ELL students?

## Review of the Literature

### Theoretical Framework

The majority of studies on college choice have been framed through one of three lenses: economical, psychological, or sociological (Hossler & Palmer, 2008; Paulsen, 1990). Economical perspectives frame college choice as the end result of a rational process that weighs costs, benefits, and various market forces (Hossler & Palmer, 2008; Paulsen & St. John, 2002). Psychological frameworks posit the student at the center and examine the stages they progress through as they navigate the college choice process (Hossler & Palmer, 2008). A variety of multi-stage, college choice models have been proposed to detail the psychological frameworks that individuals progress through in choosing to attend or not attend a postsecondary institution

(Chapman, 1981; Hanson & Litten, 1982; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Jackson, 1986; Kotler & Fox, 1985). Sociological orientations move away from the individual and concern themselves with student aspirations as they relate to status attainment in regards to college choice (Paulsen, 1990).

This study utilized the psychological framework of Hossler and Gallagher (1987) to provide a theoretical overlay. The researchers proposed a three-phase model that has become ubiquitous in the study of college choice. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) noted that, "At each phase of the student college choice process, individuals and organizational factors interact to produce outcomes" (p. 208) that affect the college choice process. Their three-phase model provided a way to place and classify events in a linear and temporally sequenced order that ultimately led individuals to the decision to enroll or not enroll into college. Their model breaks the college choice process into three distinct phases that included predisposition, search, and choice.

The predisposition phase accounted for student characteristics that influence students' inclination to enroll or not enroll into a postsecondary institution. The predisposition phase included student background information like socioeconomic status, race, gender, and student ability. In addition to individual factors, the predisposition phase also took school/college characteristics, significant others, and educational activities into account. For the purpose of this particular study, it is important to note that although individual factors related to background, attitudes, and significant others tended

to have the strongest correlation with student college choice, organizational factors interacted with these individual factors.

The search phase refers to the time when potential matriculants begin seeking out more information on their options for postsecondary enrollment. During the search phase, students begin to interact with the postsecondary institutions that they are considering. The search phase is composed of students' preliminary college values informing their search activities. In turn, their search activities are influenced by their interaction with potential colleges and universities. These processes help students to create a set of possible postsecondary institution choices or to choose paths that do not include postsecondary enrollment.

The final phase of the college choice process is choice. In this phase, the student's choice set interacts with institutional courtship activities that drive the student to make a choice of the institution that they will attend. Financial aid, institutional cost, institutional quality, and communication with potential institutions are key components that ultimately inform a student to choose a particular institution.

Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) framework was specifically chosen for this study because of the connection it makes between background characteristics, organizational factors, and the decision of the student to enroll in a postsecondary institution. Through this framework, postsecondary enrollment can be seen as the cumulative effect of a multitude of factors rather than a singular decision in time. Furthermore, the framework contains the underlying

assumption within this research that an increase of organizational factors that positively influence PSE will ultimately positively influence a student's decision to attend a postsecondary institution.

### **English Language Learners and Postsecondary Enrollment**

"A small but growing body of studies focusing specifically on ELLs' access to and attainment in college suggests the immense challenges that these students encounter if they want to advance to PSE" (Cromley & Kanno, 2012, p. 90). Further investigation was necessary to address barriers, examine current policies, and reevaluate the way the education system approaches ELLs when it comes to postsecondary enrollment due to the limited amount of literature regarding ELLs and PSE. There has been no unified approach on how to address that discrepancy, although there seems to be recognition that ELLs lag behind their non-ELL counterparts (American Youth Policy Forum, 2009).

The available research identified student-level factors such as socioeconomic background, GPA, language proficiency, academic achievement, and family capital as major contributors to PSE for ELLs (Flores, Batalova & Fix, 2012; Hein, Sambolt, & Smerdon, 2013; Kanno & Cromley, 2013; Kim, 2011). However, in examining the literature, a number of factors at the organizational level, that is within the school's sphere of influence, including school-parent communication, high expectations of students by teachers, and college preparatory opportunities emerged as possible factors that warranted investigation.

### School-Parent Communication

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) detailed the importance that parents play in students' decision to enroll in college. The influence of parents on the college choice process was described in many ways, including parent educational attainment, income, ability to deliver information, support, encouragement, and expectations. However, there has not been an investigation into the importance of school-parent communication on the PSE of ELLs. Although the supposition that a parent of an ELL student would be better in many of their roles if they communicated regularly with the school and were informed about the progress of their student seems apparent, Hossler and Gallagher (1987) did not specifically address whether any differences existed within specific student populations. This study was a vehicle to investigate the role of the parent within the context of the ELL student population as it related to PSE.

ELL authors have noted that parent involvement is integral to long-term results on student performance (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2004). Lucas (2000) identified schools that communicated with parents as supporting ELL students in actualizing PSE. Additionally, high-performing schools utilized a variety of methods to regularly communicate with the parents of their students (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996). However, teachers regularly reported difficulty in communicating with ELL students' parents (Callahan, Gandara, Maxwell-Jolly & Rumberger, 2003). In many cases, the ELL teacher, ELL paraprofessional, or administrator were the only points of communication for the parents of ELL

students (Brooks, Adams, & Morita-Mullaney, 2010). Teachers reported a general lack of communication with the parents of ELL students despite overwhelming evidence and support for increased school-parent communication when dealing with the parents of ELL students (American Youth Policy Forum, 2009; August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996; Center for Collaborative Education, 2011; Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2004). August and Hakuta (1998) identified finding new ways to communicate and engage the parents of ELL students as an important direction for future research.

### High Expectations

Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) detailed the influence of others as a large contributor to educational aspirations and prioritized the importance of parental influence. In fact, they noted that, "Parents' expectations and encouragement have the greatest effect on the predisposition stage of the college decision-making process" (Hossler et al., 1999, pg. 280). Hossler et al. also noted a decline in parental expectations for students from the 9th grade to the 12th grade by parents with low incomes, low educational attainment, and for students with poor GPAs. Additionally, students who earn higher grades might be more likely to receive individualized attention regarding college choice leading to an ongoing dialogue, acquiring information, and, in turn, the development of confidence to pursue PSE. However, Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) framework does not directly address how teacher expectations can affect a student's decision to enroll in college. Teachers have a unique position in their students' lives where they not

only provide information, but also inspire and motivate students to achieve goals.

High performing schools consistently demonstrated having high expectations for students in regards to outcomes (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996; Williams, Hakuta, Haertel, Kirst, & Levine, 2007). In particular, researchers discovered that high expectations of teachers improved ELL achievement. Characteristics of high expectations include challenging curriculum, alignment with the standards, utilizing higher order thinking skills, and student autonomy/responsibility. The idea of challenging preconceived notions of learning limitations due to language was present in schools that maintained high expectations for students regardless of their language background (Callahan, 2005; Center for Collaborative Education, 2011).

However, the reality of teachers having high expectations for ELL students does not appear to be as consistent in practice. Harklau (2000) found that institutional labeling of ELLs marginalized students academically and led to lowered teacher expectations. Lowered teacher expectations manifested themselves in academic underachievement by ELLs (Callahan, 2005). There appears to be a disconnect between what is best for ELL students in regards to teacher expectations and what actually occurs. Furthermore, examining college access becomes particularly problematic due to the disadvantages inherent in this vicious cycle of low expectation and low achievement faced by ELLs (Hein et al., 2013).

Although this study is particularly interested in exploring the

relationship between expectations of teachers on the PSE of ELL students, readers should be wary of making a causal link between the two. Strict interpretation should take into account that expectations could be a result of students' abilities. For example, high expectations might be a result of a student's advanced abilities that make them more likely to enroll in college than their lower ability peers.

### **College Preparatory Opportunities**

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) identified college preparatory opportunities as an essential component of the predisposition phase. They theorized that particular educational activities created a college-going disposition for students. The most prominent "interactive effect between individuals and high schools is range of pre-college school experiences" (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987, p. 211).

"Poverty and access to college-ready academic opportunities are among the most influential factors determining one's chances to attend college" (Flores et al., 2012, pg. 2). In fact, participation in college preparatory opportunities has been positively correlated with future success. The umbrella of college preparatory opportunities included courses that resulted in college credit, but primarily focused on developing skills that are essential in easing the transition from high school to postsecondary education (Hein et al., 2013). College preparatory opportunities included access to a rigorous high school curriculum, programs like Upward Bound or Gear Up, AP classes, and dual-credit courses (Center for Collaborative Education, 2011; Flores et al., 2012; Hein et al., 2013).

Despite studies linking access to college preparatory opportunities to PSE, ELL students as a whole do not have the same access to college preparatory opportunities as their non-ELL peers. The ELL designation and subsequent placement in ESL classes actually serve to deny ELL students access to college preparatory opportunities (Cromley & Kanno, 2012). ELL students are more likely to be placed in classes that do not prepare them for postsecondary opportunities (Callahan, 2005).

### Summary

ELL students were seemingly at a disadvantage when it came to organizational factors supporting PSE when compared to their non-ELL counterparts. The literature detailed a marked difference between what best practices are and what was actually occurring in regards to ELL students. While the difference in PSE between ELL students and non-ELL students has been thoroughly investigated, an analysis into organizational factors and their effects within the ELL population was timely. Determining whether organizational factors played a role in ELL students' PSE and the extent of that role was a logical extension of previous research. An analysis would detail what organizational factors encouraged/discouraged PSE among ELL students. The researcher hopes that findings will impact practice, inform policy decisions, and aid district- and school-level practitioners in developing an appropriate organizational approach to increase PSE among ELL students.

### Methodology

#### Data

This study utilized data from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002). ELS:2002 was the fourth study in a series meant to track and detail the progress of American students from secondary school to postsecondary work or education. Additionally, the survey data in ELS:2002 was collected to assist in the evaluation and development of policy at levels ranging from the federal government down to locally-controlled, school-level decision makers over the course of a ten year period beginning in 2002 and ending in 2012 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2002). The use of national data provided a large sample for analysis and improved the ability to generalize results to a population.

The dependent variable for this study (F3ILEVEL) was dichotomous and based upon whether a student had ever attended a postsecondary institution. Limitations included the lack of postsecondary data. However, this study was specifically aimed at determining factors that influenced PSE and did not aim to analyze data after PSE.

A number of independent variables were analyzed. The independent variables were grouped into one of three categories dependent on the organizational factor that they addressed. The three organizational factors were (a) School-Parent Communication, (b) High Expectations, and (c) College Preparatory Opportunities. A complete list of variables can be found in the appendix.

The ELS:2002 variable BYSTLANG, "Whether English is student's native language?", was used

Table 1

*Student Postsecondary Enrollment Choices – Descriptive Statistics*

	Frequency	Percent
4-Year College or University	868	33.8
2-Year College	750	29.2
Less than 2 Years	87	3.4
Did Not Enroll in 2 Year or 4 Year Institution	866	33.7
Total	2571	100.0

Table 2

*Student Sex*

	Frequency	Percent
Male	1263	49.1
Female	1308	50.9
Total	2571	100.0

Table 3

*Student Race/Ethnicity - Composite*

	Frequency	Percent
Amer. Indian/Alaska Native, non-Hispanic	22	0.9
Asian, Hawaii/Pac. Islander, non-Hispanic	985	38.3
Black or African American, non-Hispanic	112	4.4
Hispanic, no race specified	573	22.3
Hispanic, race specified	542	21.1
More than one race, non-Hispanic	79	3.1
White, non-Hispanic	258	1.0
Total	2571	100.0

to create the sample. Any student that did not indicate English as their native language was classified as ELL for the purpose of the study. The final sample size of students indicating that English was not their native language was 2,571 students. Demographic information can be found in Tables 1-3.

### **Analytical Approach**

Logistic regression was chosen as the analytical approach for this study.

Logistic regression has all but replaced ordinary least squares regression when it comes to the analysis of data using a dichotomous dependent variable. More importantly for my analysis, logistic regression describes the effects of the independent variables on the outcome variable in probability terms (Lewis-Beck, 2000). The practical application of how much effect a particular independent variable has on the outcome variable is

not only useful in interpretation, but accessible to a more broad audience consisting of policymakers, administrators, parents, students, and scholars.

Logistic regression does not face the many problems that confront ordinary regression including nonnormality, nonlinearity, heteroskedasticity, and nonsense prediction (Lewis-Beck, 2000). However, violating the assumptions that accompany logistic regression can lead to “biased coefficients, inefficient estimates, or invalid statistical inferences” (Menard, 2002, pg. 67). The major assumption that must be checked for logistic regression is that of multicollinearity. Testing for multicollinearity was done by inspecting the variation inflation factor (VIF) of independent variables against a continuous, dependent variable using linear regression. There were no issues with multicollinearity.

### **Aggregated Variables**

For the purpose of the study, multiple variables were aggregated and used to analyze the relationship of a category with the dichotomous variable. This technique was chosen because it enabled the researcher to determine if any influence of a particular organizational factor had an impact on the PSE of ELL students.

For example, the variables that determined if participation in college preparatory opportunities had an effect on ELL's PSE were an aggregate total of participation in Upward Bound, participation in Gear Up, and participation in a college preparation program for the disadvantaged. If a student participated in one of these programs, they were able to be identified

as such through the use of an aggregated categorical measure.

The same procedure was applied to the School-Parent Communication category. If a parent reported being contacted by the school for one of the variables that comprised the category, they were identified as having the benefit of School-Parent Communication. This technique allowed analysis to focus on the outcome if at least one measure was reported. Benefits of this technique included ease of interpretation by using an aggregated variable as an indicator for a variable and allowed analysis to be straightforward when faced with missing values.

### **Dummy Variables**

Dummy variables were created for ease of statistical interpretation and to allow nominal categories to be used as independent variables in logistic regression. When data was missing, a dummy variable for missing data was created for each category to maintain sample size. Missing data dummy variables were not included in the results or graphs as interpretation is nearly impossible.

## **Findings**

### **Student-Level Factors**

Several student-level factors were significantly related to the odds of postsecondary enrollment among ELLs. Across all models, females were significantly more likely to enroll ( $p < .01$ ) than their male counterparts. Additionally, Hispanic (race-specified) ELL students were significantly less likely than their Caucasian ELL counterparts to achieve PSE. Furthermore, parent influence had multiple factors that were statistically significant across various

models including mother's graduation from two-year college, father's graduation from college, and father's attainment of any advanced degree.

The analysis using block-entry logistic regression demonstrated that some organizational factors were significantly related to the odds of PSE in ELLs even after accounting for sex, race, family income, and parent educational attainment. Those results are outlined in the 3rd, 4th, and 5th model in Table 4.

### **Teacher Expectations**

The expectation levels of both math and English teachers had statistically significant relationships to PSE. Students whose English teachers expected them to graduate from college were between 48% and 53% more likely to achieve PSE than students who were only expected to graduate from high school or receive a GED. Students whose math teachers expected them to obtain a master's degrees saw the likelihood of PSE increase to between 56% and 66% as compared to students whose math teachers expected them to graduate from high school or receive their GED.

### **College Preparatory Opportunities**

Participation in at least one college preparatory opportunity (Upward Bound, Gear Up, or a college preparatory program for disadvantaged students) did not have a statistically significant effect on PSE. The odds ratio for PSE compared to students who did not participate in a college preparatory opportunity ranged between 1.097 and 1.105. Although the odds ratios were greater than 1, indicating an increased likelihood of obtaining PSE compared to the reference group, these findings were not statistically significant.

### **School-Parent Communication**

Students whose parents were contacted by the school at least once were 22.8% more likely to enroll in a postsecondary institution than their peers whose parents did not report any school-initiated communication. Similarly to college preparatory opportunities, the odds ratio was greater than 1, but was not statistically significant.

### **Discussion**

The logistic regression analysis helps to clarify the impact that organizational factors have on English language learners. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) identified the significant others as those individuals that informed, motivated, and influenced students on their decision to attend college. However, their work assumed that students have significant others outside of the school that are familiar or engaged with their decision to attend a postsecondary institution.

Their framework does not take into account many of the factors that ELL students encounter including lack of parental involvement with the school, cultural differences, and other mitigating factors. This analysis rectified that by focusing solely on the ELL subset and investigating if organizational factors influenced PSE and to what extent. The analysis discovered statistically significant predictors of PSE within organizational-level factors. Other factors, although not statistically significant, demonstrated a positive relationship between their occurrence and PSE among ELL students.

### **Teacher Expectations Matter**

The organizational factor that mattered the most in influencing ELL

Table 4

*Odds Ratios for Postsecondary Enrollment Among English Language Learners*

	Model 1 Student	Model 2 Parent's Education	Model 3 High Expectations	Model 4 College Prep Opportunities	Model 5 School-Parent Communication
<b>Student-level factors</b>					
Female	1.661***	1.667***	1.659***	1.654***	1.65***
<i>Male (reference)</i>					
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	0.481	0.489	0.509	0.517	0.51
Asian, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1.191	1.274	1.258	1.198	1.203
Black or African American	0.915	0.874	0.932	0.977	0.978
Hispanic (No race specified)	0.712**	0.845	0.853	0.881	0.872
Hispanic (race specified)	0.581***	0.653**	0.666**	0.674**	0.668**
More than One Race	0.868*	0.875	0.869	0.771	0.773
<i>White, non-Hispanic (reference)</i>					
Total Family Income Quartile 1	0.781**	0.905	0.893	0.882	0.879
Total Family Income Quartile 2	0.992	1.097	1.105	1.064	1.063
Total Family Income Quartile 4	1.330**	1.095	1.085	1.088	1.096
<i>Total Family Income Quartile 3 (reference)</i>					
<b>Mother's Highest Level of Education</b>					
Did Not Finish High School		0.803*	0.796*	0.771**	0.775**
Attended 2-Year School, No Degree		1.302	1.314	1.228	1.229
Graduated From 2-Year School		1.543**	1.546**	1.491*	1.473*
Attended College, No 4-Year Degree		1.256	1.26	1.202	1.205
Graduated From College		1.009	1.003	0.92	0.918
Completed Master's Degree or Equivalent		1.606*	1.612*	1.496	1.502
Completed PhD, MD, Other Advanced Degree		1.101	1.078	1.06	1.046
<i>Graduated From High School or GED (reference)</i>					
<b>Father's Highest Level of Education</b>					
Did Not Finish High School		1.115	1.131	1.164	1.16
Attended 2-Year School, No Degree		1.418*	1.416*	1.344	1.34
Graduated From 2-Year School		1.375	1.342	1.38	1.376
Attended College, No 4-Year Degree		1.096	1.071	1.1	1.101
Graduated From College		1.368**	1.344*	1.353*	1.343*
Completed Master's Degree or Equivalent		2.087***	1.991**	1.857**	1.838**
Completed PhD, MD, Other Advanced Degree		1.815**	1.759**	1.785**	1.769**
<i>Graduated From High School or GED (reference)</i>					
<b>High Expectations (English Teacher Expectations of Student)</b>					
Don't Know			1.28	1.245	1.252
Less Than High School Graduation			0.89	0.894	0.903
Attend or Complete 2 Year College/School			1.077	1.078	1.08
Attend College, 4-Year Degree Incomplete			1.171	1.213	1.229
Graduate From College			1.54**	1.48**	1.483**
Obtain Master's Degree or Equivalent			1.3	1.267	1.265
Obtain PhD, MD, Other Advanced Degree			1.47	1.501	1.493
<i>High School Graduation or GED Only (reference)</i>					
<b>High Expectations (Math Teacher Expectations of Student)</b>					
Don't Know			1.003	1.026	1.025
Less Than High School Graduation			1.227	1.358	1.359
Attend or Complete 2 Year College/School			1.364*	1.323	1.324
Attend College, 4-Year Degree Incomplete			1.017	1.004	1.014
Graduate From College			1.316*	1.28	1.285
Obtain Master's Degree or Equivalent			1.665**	1.562*	1.585**
Obtain PhD, MD, Other Advanced Degree			0.863	0.812	0.814
<i>High School Graduation or GED Only (reference)</i>					
<b>College Preparatory Opportunities</b>					
Participated In At Least One College Prep Opportunity				1.097	1.105
<i>Did Not Participate In College Prep Opportunity (reference)</i>					
<b>School-Parent Communication</b>					
School Communicated With Parent At Least Once					1.228
<i>School Did Not Communicate With Parent (reference)</i>					
Number of Cases in Analysis: 2,571					
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.054	0.08	0.094	0.141	0.142
-2 log likelihood	3184.093	3133.167	3104.033	3009.577	3007.862
***p<.001    **p<.05    *p<.10					

PSE was teachers having high expectations of the student. This finding supported previous work that suggested high expectations were related to positive outcomes (August & Pease-Alvarez, 1996; Callahan, 2005; Tung et al., 2011; Williams et al., 2007).

The likelihood of an ELL student enrolling in a postsecondary institution was statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) when the English teacher expected the student to graduate from college across all models when compared to an expectation of only completing high school or obtaining a GED. However, all students for whom the English teacher had an expectation above high school graduation or GED had odds ratios above 1. The expectation of success appears to have manifested itself in PSE by these students.

Math teachers had similar results when they expected their students to obtain master's degrees. The increased expectation linked to significance might be explained by the mitigation of language as an obstacle that the universal nature of math provides. Students that were expected to obtain a master's degree by their teacher were between 56% and 66% more likely to enroll in college than their counterparts that were only expected to graduate from high school or obtain a GED. Students that had teacher expectations beyond high school graduation all had odds-ratios greater than 1 except for students expected to obtain a PhD or other advanced degree. The results indicate that a school that fosters a culture of high expectations for all students encourages students to pursue PSE upon graduation. Students perform up to the expectations that are placed upon them. Schools that view

ELL students as unable, unprepared, or at a disadvantage are doing a disservice to the students that they serve. Interestingly enough, students that were expected to pursue PSE by an English teacher all demonstrated odds-ratios above 1. Despite potential language concerns, the mere expectation of PSE was associated with increased PSE compared to students only expected to graduate from high school or obtain their GED.

Administrators would be well served to instill core principles and cultural norms that address maintaining high expectations of all students. Recommendations include incorporation of ELL students into immersion learning experiences and not relying on self-contained classrooms to handle all instruction. Additionally, ELL students should be exposed to a rigorous curriculum outside of their language acquisition classes.

Furthermore, the possibility that teachers are providing integral information about PSE to students is very real. Normally parents are directly involved in information acquisition, motivation, and advice when it comes to college choice. However, if parents are not familiar with the process or disconnected by their lack of language skills, teachers might act as the buffer for ELL students. Parents who attended college in other countries might still be unfamiliar and intimidated about their role in and navigating the uncharted territory of the college choice process. Teachers with high expectations of students are more likely to communicate the possibilities that PSE bring and help guide students through the process when parents might not be equipped to do so.

### **School-Parent Communication Might Matter**

While school-parent communication was not statistically significant, students whose parents reported being contacted by the school at least once were 22.8% more likely to enroll in a postsecondary institution. Hossler et al. (1999) stated that parents were among the most important individuals in a student's decision to pursue PSE. However, parents of ELL students are less inclined to participate in school activities and be actively involved in their child's schooling.

School-initiated communication is imperative to connect ELL parents with information and updates relevant to their child's education. Schools should consider finding unique ways to engage that particular demographic beyond traditional PTOs, parent-teacher conferences, and outreach events. The effect on PSE is sizable and should factor into the decision to dedicate resources to engaging the families of ELL students in meaningful ways. The impact that parents have on student choices including PSE is also sizable and should be as informed as possible.

### **College Prep Opportunities Might Not Matter As Currently Constituted**

Participation in a college preparatory opportunity mattered the least of the three organizational factors offered. Any interpretation should be aware that there were a relatively small number of ELL students who participated in any of the programs. Limited participation might be due to the lack of appeal of traditional college preparatory opportunities to the ELL student population. Therefore, students do not participate in the offerings.

Language is a major consideration to take into account when trying to get students involved in such programs. Much like the unique challenges that parents of ELL students present to the school and its attempts to involve them, so might ELL students present to these types of programs. Administrators, program directors, and practitioners need to carefully target and address the needs of ELL students including diverse language challenges, cultural differences, lack of parental encouragement, and first generation issues.

### **Limitations**

Every study has limitations and this particular study is no different. In particular, the use of ELS:2002, a large national dataset, presented unique challenges that must be addressed. The study was limited by missing values for certain variables. As a result, aggregated variables were used to identify if at least one occurrence of a factor had occurred for school-parent communication and college preparatory opportunities. This deliberate choice demonstrated if a factor was present for a student, but did not allow for any analysis regarding the frequency of those particular variables. The study measured if the factor was present or not and did not take the quantity of occurrences into consideration.

Similarly, there was no indication of the quality of the variables contained within the dataset. The analysis simply showed that a variable had occurred or not occurred. Variables that most closely measured or appeared relevant served as proxies for constructs, but did not address the depth of the experience for students.

Teacher expectations and school-parent communication variables were only available for the base year, so analysis for these variables is limited to the student's 10th grade year. The two years leading up to a student's decision to apply and ultimately enroll in college are not factored into the analysis. Expectations change and communication could increase or decrease over the course of the two years from 10th grade to 12th grade, but was not represented in the data. This study did not account for individual student's abilities. Independent variables might be correlated to ability, and further research should control for aptitude when investigating the relationship between organizational factors and postsecondary enrollment.

Lastly, the analysis could not measure the influence of peer effect on postsecondary enrollment. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) stated that peers have a profound influence during the predisposition phase, but the variables within the dataset did not contain proxies to account for the influence of peers.

### **Suggestions**

School leaders should be cognizant of how their operations, programs, and choices affect specific populations that they serve. The research presented addressed the three research questions and provided insight into how organizational factors affect the ELL population. In particular, the research supported schools creating a culture of high expectations within their staff for all students. In line with Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) framework, teachers have a significant impact on the college enrollment decision of their students, but their relationships might be even more important for ELL students.

These students may lack input from other sources of information including parents, family members, and peers that were identified as being integral in the college choice process as well (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler et al., 1999). Even if parents had attended college in their native countries, there is no guarantee they have the familiarity with and insight to successfully help their ELL student to navigate the college choice process. Therefore, high expectations from teachers in regards to students' abilities might also measure teacher involvement, help, and motivation to engage in PSE. A school culture or organizational expectation that high expectations be expressed would surely help foster such relationships.

Other factors, although non-significant, were positively associated with PSE in ELL students. Schools need to be aware that communicating and engaging the parents of ELL students is more difficult than with the parents of non-ELL students. Therefore, new and creative approaches should be attempted. In particular, engaging ELL students in a way that is safe and language supported would increase the likelihood of starting a meaningful dialogue.

College preparatory opportunities that specifically cater to the ELL population might be a starting point to see if these types of interventions have the desired effects. Although traditional college preparatory programs typically address first-generation students, they do not address the language and cultural barriers that ELL students carry with them. As the ELL population rises in this country, a program that accounts for language in addition to first-generation college status

might be a successful avenue to address the ELL population.

### Future Research

Suggestions for future research involve using other national databases to analyze whether the same type of trends exist. Additionally, a multilevel analysis

that investigates school- and district-level trends would be useful to determine the breadth and consistency of the findings. Lastly, a program evaluation of specific college preparatory programs and their impact on ELL PSE would be key to see if the ELL population is well-served under the current models in place.

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## Appendix

### Variable Codes and Descriptions

#### Dependent Variable

F3ILEVEL Level of attended postsecondary institution

#### Independent Variables

##### *[Background]*

BYSTLANG Whether English is student's native language - composite

BYSEX Sex - composite

BYRACE Student's race/ethnicity - composite

BYINCOME Total family income from all sources 2001 - composite

MOTHERSED Mother's highest level of education - composite

FATHERSED Father's highest level of education - composite

##### *[School Parent Communication]*

BYP52A School contacted parent about poor performance

BYP52B School contacted parent about school program for year

BYP52C School contacted parent about plans after high school

BYP52D School contacted parent about course selection

BYP52E School contacted parent about poor attendance

BYP52F School contacted parent about problem behavior

BYP52G School contacted parent about positive/good behavior

BYP52H School contacted parent about fundraising/volunteer work

BYP52I School contacted parent about helping with homework

BYP52J School contacted parent to obtain information for records

##### *[High Expectations]*

BYTE20 How far teacher expects student to get in school (English)

BYTM20 How far teacher expects student to get in school (math)

##### *[College Prep]*

F1S23 Participated in college preparation program for disadvantaged

F1RAPIB Total AP/IB courses High School Transcript

F1RAPIBP Total AP/IB Courses – categorical

F1S24B Highest grade of participation in Upward Bound

F1S24BA Participated in Upward Bound in 9th grade

F1S24BB Participated in Upward Bound in 10th grade

F1S24BC Participated in Upward Bound in 11th grade

F1S24BD Participated in Upward Bound in 12th grade

F1S24BE Did not participate in Upward Bound

F1S24C Highest grade of participation in Gear Up or other program

F1S24CA Participated in Gear Up/other similar program in 9th grade

F1S24CB Participated in Gear Up/other similar program in 10th grade

F1S24CC Participated in Gear Up/other similar program in 11th grade

F1S24CD Participated in Gear Up/other similar program in 12th grade

F1S24CE Did not participate in Gear Up/other similar program