



# **Good News and Bad News Educating English Learners in the Age of Obama**

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# Advocating for ELLs

## The Good and the Bad

### Field is less isolated

- More 'attention' for students
  - ELLs less likely to be ignored
  - Yet NCLB-era 'attention' has a downside
- Bilingual Education Act is gone
  - Title I & Title III provide more funding
  - Yet little effort to target ELL needs
- ELLs served less by 'special programs,' more by mainstream 'reforms'
  - Issues not primarily about language anymore



# Advocating for ELLs

## The Good News

### Ebbing of the English-Only tide

- English-only movement running out of gas
  - Last anti-bilingual victory: MA in 2002
- No serious attack on bilingual education
  - Despite Republican campaign rhetoric
  - Political courting of Latinos
  - Language of instruction not an issue in ESEA
- Less good news for bilingualism
  - No action from Obama or Democrats



# Advocating for ELLs

## The Good News

### **Dual immersion is thriving**

- Dramatic growth of programs
- Increasing popularity with parents
- Academically impressive
- Space for creative teaching & learning
- Possible shelter from unhealthy trends



# Advocating for ELLs

## Mixed News

### No Child Left Behind is discredited

- ESEA in legislative limbo
  - No consensus on reauthorization
- Bipartisan support continues for test-and-punish ‘accountability’
  - Differences over federal role
- State legislators fall in line
  - Resistance: TEA Commissioner Scott calls testing “*a perversion of its original intent*”



# Advocating for ELLs

## Encouraging News

### States begin to resist

- TX opts out of federal initiatives
- Gov. Jerry Brown vetoes CA testing bill, which *“nowhere mentions good character or love of learning. It does allude to student excitement and creativity, but does not take these qualities seriously because they can’t be placed in a data stream.”*



# Advocating for ELLs

## The Bad News

### Rising tide of 'data-driven' reforms

- 'Common Core' national standards
  - Huge diversion of resources
  - Where's the evidence of its benefits?
  - With more standards come more tests, higher stakes
  - Divisions among ELL educators
- Classroom impact
  - The New Behaviorism



# Advocating for ELLs

## The Bad News

### **Adverse political climate for K12**

- Unprecedented budget cuts by states
  - 250,000 teachers laid off
- Scapegoating of American schools, educators
  - Sec. Duncan leads the charge
- Privatization agenda
  - Charter schools, online education, billions for testing, test-prep materials
  - Driven by elites, foundations



# ESEA Reauthorization

## What to Do about NCLB?

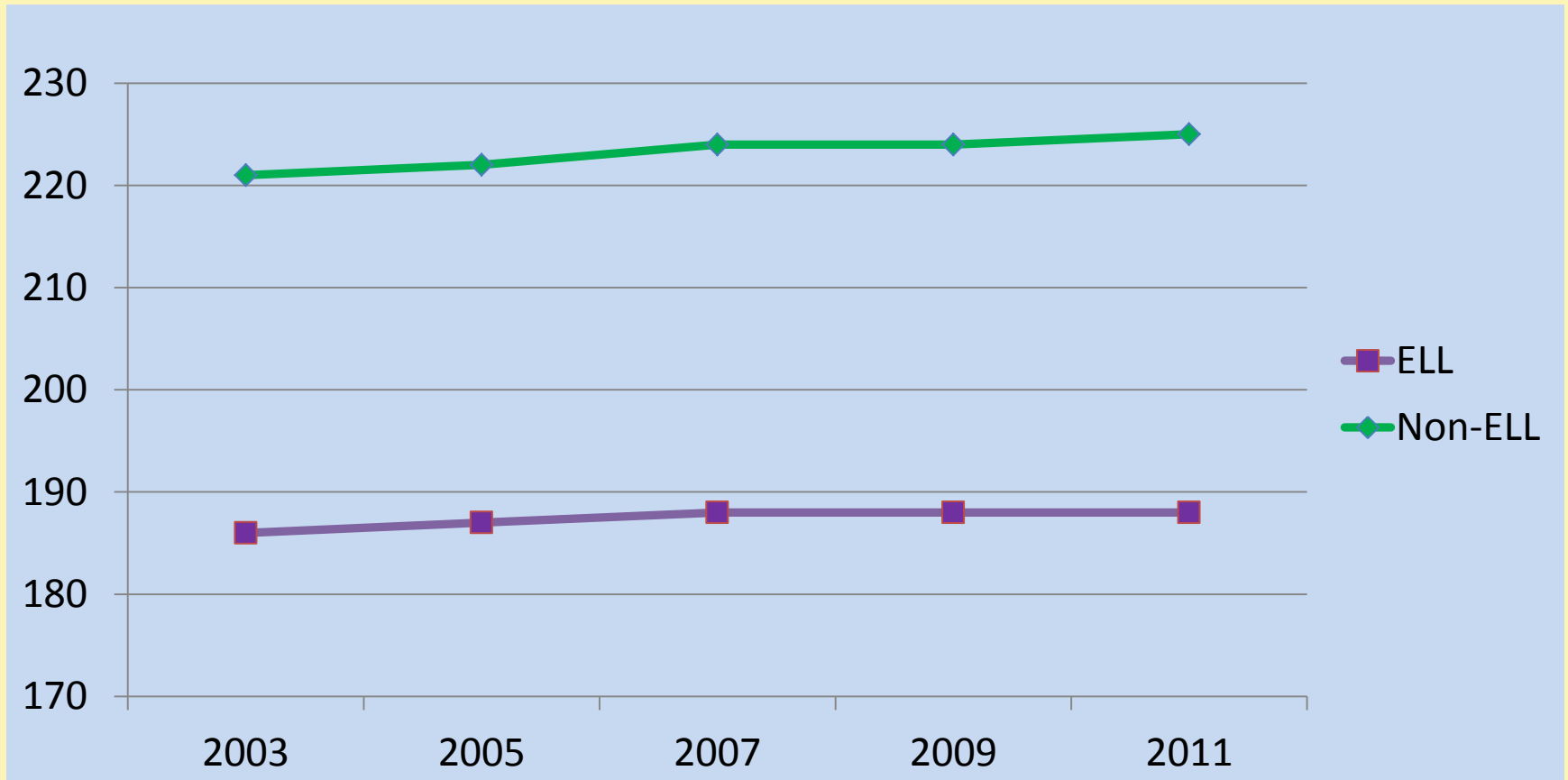
### **A Lost Decade for School Improvement**

- Narrowed curriculum
- Excessive test-prep
- Lowered standards, gaming the system
- Rampant cheating
- Demoralized educators
- Little progress on 'achievement gap'
- Failure to address child poverty
- Flat scores on NAEP



# NCLB Impact

NAEP 4th Grade Reading, 2003 – 2011  
National Results, ELLs vs. non-ELLs





# Pre-NCLB Progress

NAEP 4th Grade Reading, 1998 – 2003  
National Results, ELLs vs. non-ELLs

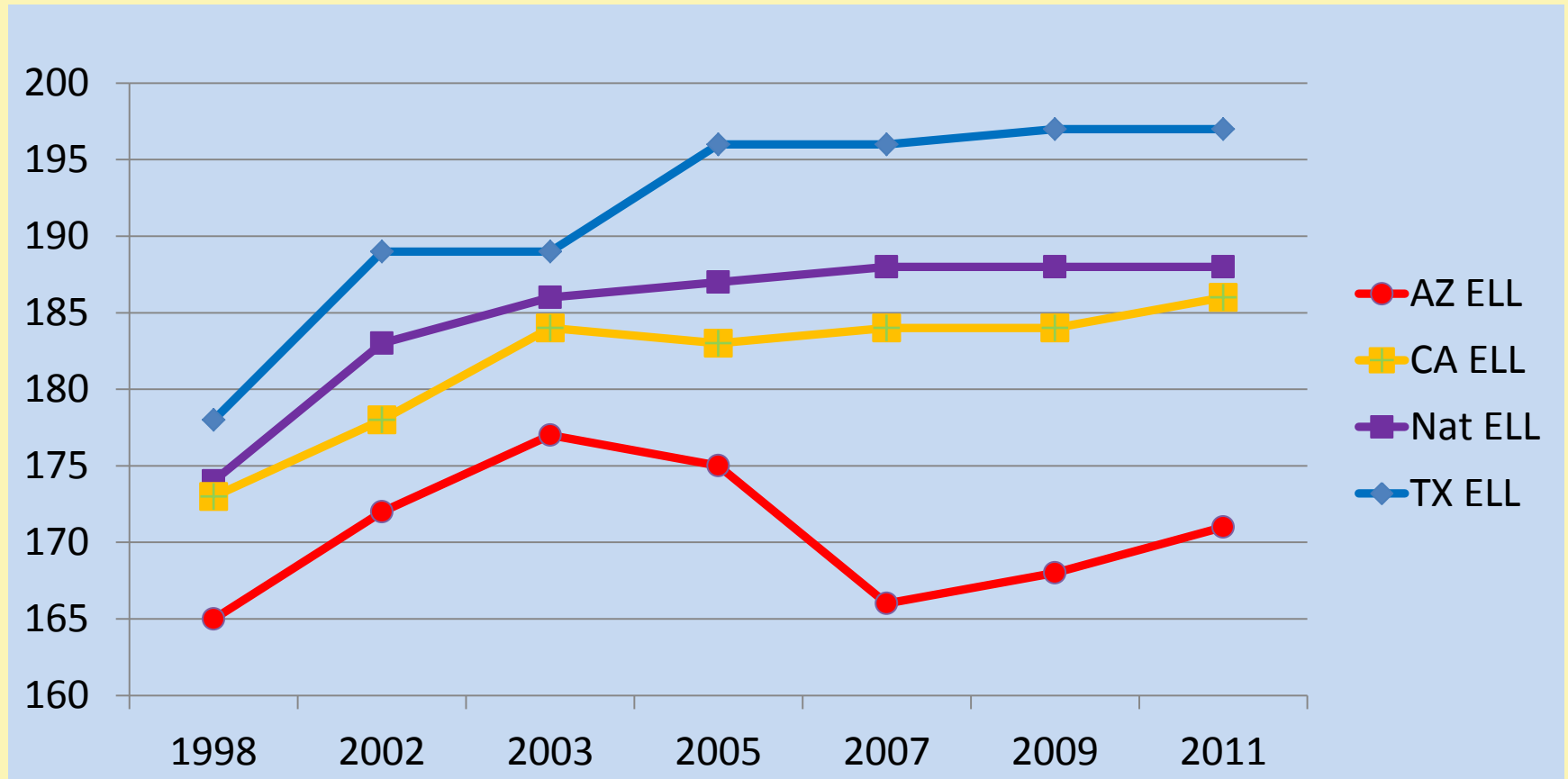




# 'Achievement Gap'

NAEP 4th Grade Reading, 1998 – 2011

ELLs in TX vs. English-Only States





# ESEA Reauthorization

## Minor Tinkering with NCLB

### Senate Democrats' Plan

- Rename the law – no more No Child
- Repeal AYP, consider academic growth
- Harsh penalties for bottom 5-10% of schools
- Explosive growth of testing
  - Retains NCLB mandates
  - Adds formative assessments
  - Test-based teacher evaluations to receive \$\$\$



# ESEA Reauthorization

## Limiting Federal Mandates?

### House Republicans' Plan

- Expand federal \$ for charter schools
- Give states 'flexibility' in Title I spending
- Eliminate Title III
- No plan to address poverty
- Explosive growth of testing
  - Retains NCLB mandates except in science
  - Test-based teacher evaluations mandated



# ESEA Reauthorization

Change We Can Believe In?

## From Obama's State of the Union:

*“Grant schools flexibility: To teach with creativity and passion; to stop teaching to the test; and to replace teachers who just aren't helping kids learn. That's a bargain worth making.”*



# ESEA Reauthorization

Change We Can Believe In?

## Obama version of 'reform'

- Unprecedented federal leverage over schools
  - Race to the Top, School Improvement & Teacher Incentive grants, 'Waivers' of NCLB
- New mandates, higher stakes for testing
  - Common Core standards
  - Using test scores to evaluate & pay teachers
  - Draconian penalties for lowest 5% of schools
  - Formative assessments, fall-spring growth
  - Tests in every subject
- Is Obama aware of his own policies?



# Fixing NCLB

## Obama on Testing

*“We have piled on a lot of standardized tests on our kids. Too often what we've been doing is using these tests to punish students or to, in some cases, punish schools.”*

*“Let's apply it in a less pressured-packed atmosphere. Let's figure out whether we have to do it every year. ... And let's make sure that that's not the only way we're judging whether a school is doing well.”*



# Fixing NCLB

## Obama Speaks as a Parent

*“One thing I never want to see happen is schools that are just teaching to the test. Because then you're not learning about the world; you're not learning about different cultures, you're not learning about science, you're not learning about math. ...*

*“And that's not going to make education interesting to you. Young people do well in stuff that they're interested in. They're not going to do as well if it's boring.”*



# ESEA Reauthorization

## Proper Federal Role in K12?

- Ensure equal opportunity
- Provide funding for
  - Educational research
  - Underserved groups
  - Worthy categorical programs
- *Not to*
  - Micromanage local schools
  - Impose accountability systems
  - Dictate curriculum
  - Mandate policies unsupported by research



# Test-Based Accountability

## What Does the Research Say?

### No Evidence That It Works

- National Academy of Sciences review of available research (2011)
  - Test-based accountability has had very small effects in raising scores
  - High-school graduation exams have not raised scores but have lowered graduation rates
- POINT Study, Vanderbilt University (2010)
  - Test-based ‘merit pay’ for teachers does not increase student achievement



# Test-Based Accountability

## Why the Broad Bipartisan Support?

- Politicians seek ‘problems’ to solve
  - False claim that U.S. lags other nations
  - Simple solutions, easy to explain to voters
- Sounds ‘tough’ yet compassionate
  - Purports to benefit minority kids, ELLs
- Costs much less than addressing poverty
- Privatization has powerful constituency
  - Charter schools disempower teachers unions
- Brings huge financial benefits to education industry



# Test-Based Accountability

What's Behind It?

**Joanne Weiss, U.S. Dept. of Education:**

*"The development of common standards and shared assessments radically alters the market for innovation in curriculum development, professional development, and formative assessments. ..."*

*"[It] means that education entrepreneurs will enjoy national markets where the best products can be taken to scale."*



# Test-Based Accountability

What's the Impact on Instruction?

## Widely acknowledged effects

- Teaching to (English-language) tests
- Excessive test-prep
- Narrowing the curriculum
- Instruction that stresses what's easy to measure: basic knowledge & skills
- Makes school “boring,” limits engagement



# Test-Based Accountability

What's the Impact on Instruction?

## Less obvious, but more ominous effects

- Transmission model
- Stress on 'direct instruction'
- Teachers as technicians
- Students as empty vessels to be filled with 'content'
- Top-down, mandated curriculum



# The New Behaviorism

## Impact on ELLs

- Forgetting what we've learned about language teaching
  - Ignoring Cummins & Krashen
  - Skill-building approaches
  - 'Explicit, systematic ELD'
- Shaky 'research-based' claims
  - Unscientific use of data
  - Hard evidence or 'best guess'?



# The New Behaviorism

## Impact on ELLs

- Rigid curriculum ‘aligned’ to standards
  - Ignoring Piaget & Vygotsky
  - Marginalizing creative teaching
- Discouraging students from:
  - Active, self-directed learning
  - Discovery learning
  - Collaborative learning
  - Intellectual curiosity



# Constructivist Alternative

## Teaching the Way Children Learn

**Beverly Falk:**

*“Learning is something that a learner does, not something that is done to the learner.”*



# Constructivism and Immersion

## A Natural Combination

### Language learning not a passive process

- Transmission model ineffective
- Acquisition = comprehending messages & *constructing meaning*
- Requires motivation to learn
- Supported by cross-cultural relationships
- Sheltering is key



# Constructivism and Immersion

## A Natural Combination

### All learning involves inquiry & discovery

- Making sense of the world
- Reconciling new facts with mental models & *constructing meaning*
- Internally motivated, self-directed process
- Supported by social interaction
- Scaffolding is key



# Constructivism and Bilingualism

## A Yearlong Narrative

*DIARY OF A*  
***BILINGUAL***  
***SCHOOL***



✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂ ✂  
Sharon Adelman Reyes  
& James Crawford

- Overview of dual immersion
- Overview of constructivism
- Stories from a 2nd grade classroom
- Student outcomes 15 years later



# Advocating for ELLs

## Changing the Paradigm

- Stress educational philosophy, methodology
  - It's not just about language
- Resist top-down mandates
  - Don't smother creative educators, students
- Combat corporate control
  - Decisions must benefit kids, not entrepreneurs
- Address child poverty and its effects
  - Key to making schools count



# A New Paradigm

## When & Where Will It Emerge?

- 2012 election is irrelevant
- Voters are confused over 'school reform'
- Alternative message?
- Consider Occupy Wall Street
  - Changed terms of national discussion
  - '99% vs. 1%' captured grassroots imagination
- Activism by educators, parents will be key



*For more information ...*

[www.DiversityLearningK12.com](http://www.DiversityLearningK12.com)

[www.ELLAdvocates.org](http://www.ELLAdvocates.org)

[www.LanguagePolicy.net](http://www.LanguagePolicy.net)