

Vignette: Study 1 (Course-taking) – Counselors’ Dilemmas

As you read the following vignette, please consider the following questions:

- What are some of the most salient issues counselors face as they place English Learners into classes?
- How are the students’ challenges unique to English Learners?
- How do counselors’ decisions impact the lives and options of English Learners?
- If you were Ms. Cartwright, what schedule would you design for Rocio? In both the short- and long-term, what actions could teachers, counselors, school administrators, district administrators, and state policymakers take to support access to both English development and grade-level content for dually identified students like Rocio?
- If you were Ms. Cartwright, how would you design Carla’s schedule to support both her English development and her academic growth in math and science, while balancing graduation requirements and Carla’s postsecondary goals? What can teachers, counselors, and school administrators do to help newcomer students like Carla continue to excel academically while they build the language skills necessary to thrive in U.S. schools?

Ms. Cartwright is the counselor at Oak Hills High School in a suburb of Portland, Oregon. It’s the last few weeks of the school year, and Ms. Cartwright is working on making next year’s course placements for two students classified as English learners and is encountering a number of challenges. Below we provide descriptions of each student and the course placement challenges Ms. Cartwright is navigating.

Student 1:

Rocio is a multilingual student who will be in 11th grade at Oak Hills in the fall. She loves drawing on her iPad and is very interested in the graphic design CTE program at Oak Hills. She was born in the U.S. and speaks both Spanish and English at home. She has been classified as an English learner (EL) since entering kindergarten. Towards the end of elementary school, she was identified as having a learning disability and began receiving special education services. Throughout middle and high school, two periods of her schedule have been taken up, one each for an English language development (ELD) class and a special education Learning

Strategies course. While she has scored proficient on the state English language proficiency assessment for many years, she typically scores at the intermediate level on the reading and/or writing domain subtests, and therefore is not yet eligible to exit EL services. (Oregon requires that all students score at a minimum of early advanced on all four domain subtests in order to be reclassified). Rocio has told Ms. Cartwright that she finds her ELD course very boring and really doesn't want to take ELD next year. With both ELD and Learning Strategies on her schedule, Rocio won't be able to fit in her content requirements plus the graphic design CTE courses that she wants to take. In addition, Rocio failed her Geometry class in 10th grade and needs to make up that credit, plus complete the third math credit required for high school graduation in Oregon.

Ms. Cartwright has heard from multiple dually identified students like Rocio who have attended U.S. schools for many years that they dislike being in both ELD and Learning Strategies because it doesn't leave them enough space on their schedule to take classes that interest them. At the same time, Ms. Cartwright knows that Oak Hills must provide Rocio opportunities to develop English and services to address her learning disability. Ms. Cartwright is considering recommending that Rocio enroll in Geometry during summer school, but she knows the teacher for that course, like most math teachers in the district, does not hold an ESOL endorsement nor have any other substantial training to work with EL-classified students, and she has seen multiple dually identified students fail the summer Geometry course.

Student 2:

Carla is a rising 10th grade student who recently arrived at Oak Hills from Mexico. In her previous school, Carla was always a high-performing student, particularly excelling in math and science. Before moving to the U.S., she was studying concepts that were beyond the grade-level curriculum, and her teachers frequently highlighted her strong analytical and problem-solving skills. However, Carla had no prior exposure to English.

Given Carla's status as a newcomer who is just beginning to learn English, the school's ELD team has recommended that Carla take two periods of ELD each day, designed specifically for newcomers. While it is essential that Carla build foundational English skills, this structure significantly limits her ability to take the advanced content courses that would challenge her academically and prepare her for the future STEM opportunities she'll need for a competitive college application. Carla is eager to continue advancing her math and science knowledge while completing graduation requirements, but feels constrained by the need to prioritize language acquisition in her schedule.

Ms. Cartwright faces the challenge of balancing Carla’s need for intensive English instruction with her advanced academic abilities. Carla is highly motivated and determined to continue her progress in math and science, but the pressure of meeting graduation requirements while taking multiple periods of ELD leaves her with limited options for content-area courses. Ms. Cartwright is exploring ways to provide Carla with the English support she needs while ensuring she has access to the challenging math and science classes that match her skills. She is also worried that Carla might struggle in the advanced math and science classes at Oak Hills, not due to her academic ability, but because the school does not have bilingual STEM courses, and the instruction offered in the available advanced math and science courses may not be readily accessible to students with beginning English proficiency.