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See Me, Support Me: A Platform for Student Voice Can Unlock Teachers' Support for English Language Learner Students in the Entrance to High School

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Objective: English language learner (ELL) students are one of the most rapidly growing student groups. Yet often, these students are marginalized and do not feel they belong in school. Across two studies, the present work evaluates an adaptation of the lifting the bar (Walton et al., 2021) procedure to give ELL students entering high school a platform called *See Me, Support Me* to introduce themselves on their terms to an educator of their choosing. ***Method:*** Study 1, a structured qualitative study ($N = 11$ ELL students), explored how ELL students use the *See Me, Support Me* platform. Next, a pilot study ($N = 352$ general adults) and Study 2 ($N = 246$ teachers) tested the effect of student self-introductions, included in a one-page letter, on responses to an ELL student. ***Results:*** Across the studies, we find that students use the platform by affirming their commitment to education and goals to grow academically while asking an educator to partner with them in this growth. In turn, as compared with participants who did not receive this letter, those who did saw the ELL student as more committed to education and were more willing to play mentorship roles for them. ***Conclusion:*** This work suggests the potential to provide ELL students a platform to vocalize their goals, needs, and ambitions to bring students and teachers together and help both succeed.

Public Significance Statement
English language learners are among the fastest growing student groups yet are often at risk of being misseen, unseen, or misunderstood in school. The present studies suggest that when given a platform to introduce themselves to an educator, students affirmed their commitment to school and asked for a partner to support their growth. In turn, when educators received such introductions, they responded to the student's call with increased support.

Keywords: teacher–student relationships, English language learners, stereotypes, student voice

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In the United States, English language learner (ELL) students represent one of the fastest growing student groups, particularly in underresourced, low-income, immigrant communities (Artiles et al., 2005). ELLs now make up over 10% of public school students in the United States, with Latine youth comprising the bulk of ELL students, making up 76% of the ELL population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024).

Despite the growth of the ELL student population, these students often do not experience full integration in schools. ELL students report feeling less connected to school as compared with non-ELL peers (Cha et al., 2017). This is particularly concerning given the close relationship between students' experiences of belonging and academic success (Gopalan & Brady, 2020; Gray et al., 2018; Walton & Cohen, 2007). Indeed, ELL students obtain lower academic performance and graduation rates compared with non-ELL students (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). While schools have implemented curricular reforms to support ELL students, such as English immersion classes, supplemental bilingual classes, and bilingual immersion classes (Gutiérrez et al., 2000), what has not been developed is a systematic approach to strengthen the relationships between ELL students and their teachers.

Strong teacher–student relationships serve many functions for students, including to support students' belonging, learning, and academic performance; to help students see the kinds of people they can become and to motivate their efforts to realize this; and to help them manage and learn from conflicts (Allen et al., 2018; Chhuon & Wallace, 2014; Murray & Malmgren, 2005; Thijs & Fleischmann, 2015). Yet, many students lack strong relationships with supportive educators. A 2021 statewide study found that more than 40% of California ninth graders reported that they did not have a caring relationship with an adult at school (Austin et al., 2023). A longitudinal study of nearly nineteen thousand students found that students who had a natural mentor (e.g., teacher, coach) in high school were far more likely to attend college than peers who did not (Kraft et al., 2023). Yet only 15% of students had such a mentor, and fewer yet among students from low-income families, for whom this benefit was greatest.

Despite the critical role educators play in students' development, many students face stereotypes that compromise how they are seen in school and the kinds of relationships they come to form with teachers (Okonofua, Walton, & Eberhardt, 2016). In this context, the very categorization of students as ELLs may obscure the values, goals, and needs faced by individual students (Arney & Rozek, 2024; Ruiz et al., 2025; Walton et al., 2021). Like students in other marginalized populations, such as students in foster care, students with disabilities, and students involved in the justice system, ELL students are a legally defined category that come with specific (e.g., curricular) requirements. In California, an English Learner is a student who enrolls in a California school beginning in any grade level, transitional kindergarten through grade twelve, [who] has a language other than English identified on the Home Language Survey, and upon assessment, [has] obtained a level of English proficiency that indicates programs and services are necessary. Students identified as ELs receive programs and services until they meet the reclassification criteria pursuant to Education Code (EC) Section 313. (California Department of Education, 2025)

This definition provides guidance for classroom instruction and/or support services that ELL students may receive. Yet it is well-established that labels, both administrative categories and informal stereotypes, can obscure the individual characteristics of people and, in so doing, produce self-fulfilling patterns of interaction (Murdock-Perriera & Sedlacek, 2018; Rosenhan, 1973; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). In education, for instance, the stereotype that Black students misbehave can lead teachers to perceive "a troublemaker" more quickly in a sequence of misbehaviors from a Black than from a White student and then respond more punitively (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). In turn, this response feeds perceptions of bias and feelings of disrespect among students of color, reducing their motivation to behave well in class and accelerating conflict with teachers (Goyer et al., 2019; Okonofua, Paunesku, & Walton, 2016; Okonofua, Walton, & Eberhardt, 2016). Notably, Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) classic research on teacher expectancy effects was motivated in part by the belief that teachers expected lower levels of achievement among boys who presented as more Mexican. The introduction of strong expectations for growth (academic bloomer) sought to counter these stereotypical beliefs.

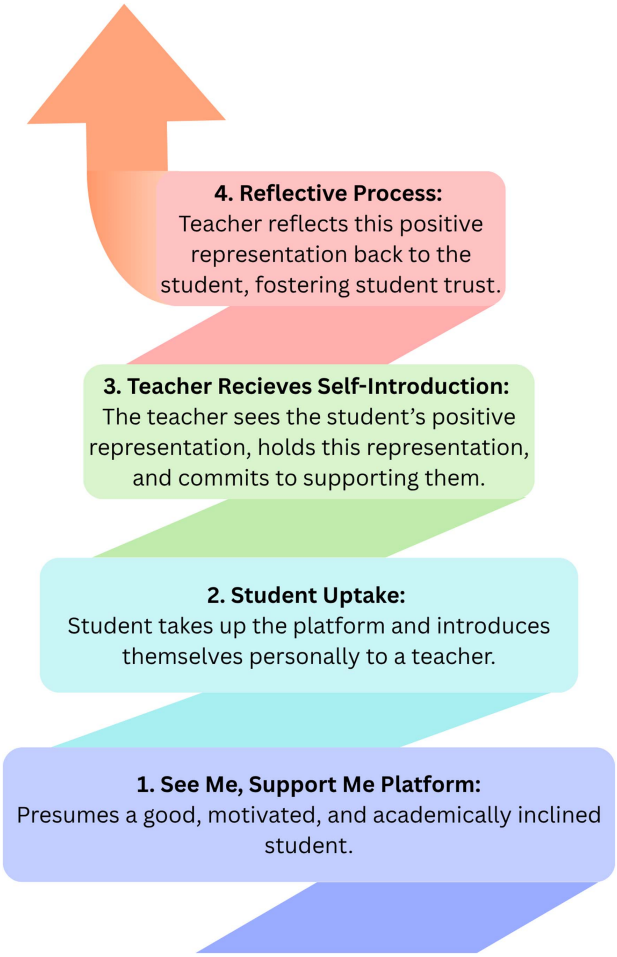
While less research has explored the consequences of classifying a student as an ELL, one study interviewed 13 "long-term ELL" students (students classified as ELL for more than 5 years) and found that, despite a strong desire to attend college, students reported that they were kept out of advanced placement classes by educators who saw their ELL classification as an indicator that they were not "capable, motivated, and independent learners" (Kim & García, 2014). While it may be essential to take a student's proficiency in English into account to support them effectively, if this is all an educator sees, they may not recognize the student's values, goals, and motivation, thereby constraining opportunities for growth (Khan, 2020).

In some cases, educators may resist this pernicious influence by attempting to disregard labels entirely. For example, individuals and institutions might push back against racial or ethnic stereotypes by asserting a colorblind stance—claiming that they view and treat everyone the same, regardless of race or ethnicity. Even if well-intended, such messaging can be counterproductive for students of color, in part because it can imply disregard for their valued identity and background and/or a lack of consideration for how this identity affects their opportunities and well-being (Birnbaum et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2022; Ullucci & Battey, 2011). When applied to legal and administrative categories, a willful blindness to a student's circumstance, such as an ELL student, may lead educators to neglect a student's need for targeted support. Emphasizing equality may not produce equity.

Ultimately, educators must recognize the value of an administrative label, for instance, in informing how to support a student, but not define a student by that label (Demetriou, 2022; Ruiz et al., 2025). In the present research, we develop a structured protocol to give ELL students an opportunity to introduce themselves directly to a teacher of their choosing, including describing their values and goals in school and challenges they face that the educator could help with. The primary goal is to displace (or "sideline"; Okonofua et al., 2022) negative stereotypes that can otherwise predefine ELL students, namely, as limited in their ability to learn and, by extension, limited in their motivation and commitment to school. Accordingly, we theorize that the protocol, called *See Me, Support Me*,[1] can initiate a spiral of trust and belonging for students and teachers (Figure 1). While the protocol describes the student as an ELL, it simultaneously assumes goodness, strength, and a positive orientation toward school in the student (Step 1); allows the student to elaborate upon this for

[1] The name of the protocol, *See Me, Support Me*, is italicized throughout the article to distinguish it as a formal approach.

Figure 1
A Spiral of Trust and Belonging



Note. Step 1 is an inherent feature of the *See Me, Support Me* platform, created by design. We examine Step 2 (how students use the platform) in Study 1 and Step 3 (how teachers respond to students' self-introductions) in Study 2. Future research may examine Step 4 and student (and teacher) outcomes over time. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

themselves (Step 2); and then, to share this positive, promotes school-oriented self-representation in an introduction to a teacher (Step 3). In so doing, we hope to affirm students' self-identity and teachers' representation of the student in terms of the core values of school, thus enhancing conditions for the student's success.

In the present research, we focus on Steps 2 and 3: Whether students use the platform to introduce themselves to teachers in specific, compelling ways (Study 1) and whether students' self-introductions causally affect teachers' views of and response to ELL students in ways known to make a difference for student success (Study 2). While we do not examine student outcomes over time here, our theory is that several mechanisms may issue from this process to facilitate positive change, mechanisms that center both teachers and students (Step 4). First, with greater confidence in the student's commitment to school and potential for success, teachers may be more willing to support the student (e.g., Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). For instance, teachers may be able to reflect a positive representation back to the student when the student needs it, such as if they misbehave or disengage from a learning opportunity, by reminding them of their goals and providing support (Ruiz et al., 2025). Second, awareness among students of the more positive and personalized view a teacher holds of them may mitigate experiences of threat, that is, the fear that one might be viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, which can otherwise sit in the air between students and teachers, compromising cycles of interactions between the two (Okonofua, Walton, & Eberhardt, 2016; Steele, 1997; Yeager et al., 2014).

The *See Me, Support Me* protocol builds on, and extends, prior research showing that short, targeted interventions, geared toward mitigating the application and experience of stereotypes among marginalized students, have the potential to cause sustained gains in school experience and academic achievement by triggering similar spirals of trust, belonging, and growth (e.g., Brady et al., 2020; Goyer et al., 2019). Improving spirals of trust and belonging is particularly relevant for ELL students given the invisibility (Pettit, 2011) and classroom segregation (Gandara & Orfield, 2010) many ELL students experience in school. In focusing on Steps 2 and 3, we hope to establish a basis for future research that examines Step 4 and student outcomes over time, such as improved teacher–student relationships, enhanced learning (e.g., grade point average, course credit attainment), improved classroom behavior (e.g., increased attendance, reduced disciplinary problems), and greater placement in on-track academic trajectories (e.g., mainstream or advanced course sequences, not remedial sequences; Goyer et al., 2017).

In creating a specific opportunity for student voice, our approach complements and extends past research on strategies to support teacher–student relationships across group lines. Barriers examined in past research include language barriers (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010), cultural misunderstandings (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017), and intergroup mistrust (Dee, 2004; Gershenson et al., 2022; Yeager et al., 2017). Yet only rarely has such research explored the potential for changes in specific practices to strengthen teacher–student relationships or tested the causal effects of these changes (cf. Yeager et al., 2014, 2017). Other past research has focused on developing programs, like mentor programs, to facilitate relationships with caring adults (Claro & Perelmiter, 2022; de Anda, 2001; Murray & Malmgren, 2005). But in school, students and teachers are already in structured relationships that provide ample opportunities to interact. What is needed in this context, we theorize, is an opportunity for teachers to understand an ELL student's positive values and commitment to school and to learn specifically what they can do to help the student work toward their goals. Consistent with our emphasis, past research identifies the importance for students of "natural" mentors in school (Kraft et al., 2023), of student-initiated relationships (Spencer et al., 2016, 2019; see also Schwartz et al., 2013), and of "being known" by educators (Chhuon & Wallace, 2014). Thus, we explore the potential of a structured way for students to introduce themselves on their terms to a teacher of their choosing as a potential catalyst for a sustained spiral of trust and belonging.

To do so, we adapted the lifting the bar procedure, which was originally developed to support another population that is readily misseen in school: students returning to school from the juvenile detention system (Walton et al., 2021). Our adaptation—*See Me, Support Me*—focused on ELL students as they made the transition to high school, as this is a critical period when academic performance in many student groups drops (Crosnoe, 2011; Sutton et al., 2018).

As noted, this article has two primary goals. First, using qualitative methods, we assess how ELL students use *See Me, Support Me* to

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introduce themselves to an educator of their choosing (Step 2; Study 1). Second, using experimental methods, we test how students' self-introductions shift teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward a target ELL student in ways known to enhance student growth and learning (Step 3; Study 2).

See Me, Support Me has two parts. First, the student completes a 45-min session. This produces a one-page letter, which is then delivered to an educator of the student's choosing. In the 45-min session, students (a) reflect on their values and goals in school; (b) read, hear, and reflect on stories from older students, who describe the challenges of navigating high school as an ELL student but the opportunity to make progress, in part by building strong relationships with adults; (c) share their advice for future students; and (d) identify up to three adults in school who are not yet but could be an important source of support for them and share what they would like these educators to know about who they are as a person, their goals and values, and challenges they face that they could help with.

To deliver the letter, we take on a brokering role: The facilitator places the student's self-introduction in a standard one-page letter, presented on joint letterhead from Stanford and the partnering school site, and hand delivers this letter to one of the educators the student identified (see Figure 2). The letter emphasizes that the student has personally requested the educator's support, asks them to reach out to the student soon and to support them in school, and thanks them for their work. It is honorific and noncontrolling. In this way, the program elevates children's own voices in a personal request for support from an educator responsible for their development while allowing the educator to leverage their professional expertise to build a positive relationship with and support the student.

Implemented in a small initial randomized controlled field trial with justice-involved youth, Walton et al. (2021) found that lifting the bar reduced recidivism to juvenile detention through the next term by 40 percentage points, from 69% to 29%. Importantly, it was the delivery of the letter to the educator, not students' completion of the 45-min session, that drove this improvement. Carefully designed experiments with large samples of educators further reveal the power of the letter to enhance educators' responses, at least to justice-involved students. When educators imagined receiving the letter rather than not, they saw a justice-involved student as more committed to school; felt more committed to them in turn; were more willing to take on a variety of mentoring roles for them; and anticipated greater success for them (Ruiz et al., 2025; Walton et al., 2021). Ultimately, the letter led teachers to see justice-involved youth not as problems but as young people facing challenges and seeking their support. They responded by offering this support.

Could ELL students also benefit from a platform like this? ELL and justice-involved students differ in many ways, including in the nature of the stereotypes they face. Stereotypes of ELL students, for instance, may allege a lack of ability in, preparation for, or commitment to school, but not the aggressive, violent, or disruptive behavior implied in stereotypes of justice-involved youth. Yet ELL students also risk being reduced to a stereotype in the classroom, or completely overlooked, leading to an invisibility (Pettit, 2011).

Here, we seek to establish the empirical foundation for future field research that evaluates the causal effects of *See Me, Support Me* on outcomes of importance for both students and teachers over time. In the General Discussion section, we discuss opportunities for future research that explore consequences for students' real-world school experience and the psychological, behavioral, and relational processes that may contribute to such change.

Study 1: How Do ELL Students Use the *See Me, Support Me* Platform?

We adapted the lifting the bar protocol and implemented it with a small sample of ELL students in the transition to high school. Our goal in this structured qualitative study was to learn how students used this platform to introduce themselves to a teacher of their choosing.

Method

Participants and Context

The sample comprised 11 students (64% female; age: 14–15 years), classified as ELLs, beginning high school. Consistent with the ELL student population, in this community, all students were Latine. Their first languages were either Spanish (73%) or Mixteco (27%). All had a long-term ELL classification, having been designated as an ELL student for at least 5 years.

The study was conducted in partnership with a midsized high school in a rural community with an agriculture-based economy in the Western United States. The city population is 80% Latine and 37.3% foreign born, with 73.5% of residents speaking a language other than English at home, with that other language being Spanish for 69.3% residents (United States Census Bureau, n.d.). Among the approximately 1,600 students in the high school, 90% were Latine, and 81% were socioeconomically disadvantaged, as defined by receiving free or reduced lunch or having a parent/guardian who did not receive a high school diploma (California School Dashboard). Additionally, the principal noted that, during the 2022–2023 academic year when Study 1 was conducted, one third of incoming ninth-grade students were ELLs, positioning this school as an ideal site for the development of supports for this population.

Materials

Development. The structure of *See Me, Support Me* followed lifting the bar (Walton et al., 2021) but with specific revisions to the contents of the materials to elevate key themes for ELL students. The development process began with informal interviews and focus groups with six to eight older ELL students who had previously transitioned to high school. Following these conversations, we drafted stories designed to illustrate paradigmatic aspects of ELL students' experiences coming to high school, focusing on common challenges, how students could form relationships with educators, and how these relationships could help them meet these challenges. Then, we shared these stories back with the same ELL students and iteratively refined them in a collaborative editing process. The final four stories were then audio recorded by older ELL students in English and in Spanish. Finally, we shared the stories with a second group of five long-term ELL high school sophomores and sought their feedback on story relevance, accessibility, and engagingness and made relevant revisions.

Structure and Content. The exercise included five steps. First, students read materials that described challenges older ELL students experienced in coming to high school, including staying on track academically, navigating language barriers, and managing financial

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Figure 2
The See Me, Support Me Letter

[School Letterhead] | Stanford University

Dear [*Mr./Ms./Mx. educator last name*]

We hope that your school year is going well.

Your student, [*student full name*] started at our school as an English Language Learner (ELL) student. [He/she/they] decided to participate in Project Achieve to improve [his/her/their] experience in our school. As part of this program, students have the opportunity to identify an adult in school whom they would like to be a partner for them in this experience. As you know, one of the most important factors in any student's development is having a trusting and positive relationship with an adult in school.

[*student first name*] would like for you to be this adult for [him/her/them].

Transitioning from middle school to high school can be difficult for any student, but especially for ELL students. Some days will be easier, and some days will be harder.

We hope that you will be able to be there for this student and to help [him/her/them] grow and overcome the challenges that [he/she/they] face(s). We also hope that a strong relationship with you will help [*student first name*] develop better relationships with other teachers and have a better school experience as a whole.

As part of our process, we asked [*student first name*] what [he/she/they] would like you to know about [him/her/them]. Here is what [he/she/they] said [he/she/they] would like you to know:

- *Sample Student Response:* I would like my teacher to know that I am putting my best foot forward even if it doesn't look like am trying hard enough or am not interested. I would also like them to know that I will always try and participate in class even if I know I don't have the right answer.
- *Sample Student Response:* I would like my teacher to know that this school year I am trying to have at least all A's or all B's which I know will be hard but I am always trying to improve in my school work. Also for them to know that I am trying to grow some bond with all of them.
- *Sample Student Response:* I would like my teacher to know that if I don't know how to do something I will continue to try it but it does get to chaotic and I am not the most comfortable with asking teachers questions about school work or homework.

We encourage you to reach out and talk to [him/her/them] within the next week. For example, you could talk with [him/her/them] about some things that are important to [him/her/them], some of [his/her/their] goals in school, and/or ways that you could be helpful to [him/her/them] during this experience.

The first few weeks back are important to a successful experience, so we hope you are able to reach out and talk with [*student first name*] soon.

At the end of the day, teachers like you are on the front lines and are the most important people for the success of [*student first name*] and all of your students. Thank you for your work.

If you have any questions, please contact the Lead Researcher, [*research staff name*], at [email@stanford.edu].

Thank you for your work,
The Stanford University Project Achieve

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hardships and how these experiences improved with time as students (a) reflected on what they valued in school and (b) built positive relationships with teachers.

Second, students reviewed a list of eight values in school (e.g., "prepare myself for college"), three of which were explicitly related to family (e.g., "be a good role model for my younger brother or sister," "make my parents proud of me"), identified those values that were most important to them personally, and described why.

Third, students read and listened to the four stories from older ELL students. Each described a personal experience developing trusting relationships with educators that helped them work toward their goals in school. The stories emphasized students' role and agency in building these relationships. Here is one:

> I knew that coming to high school was going to be hard. Sometimes it felt like I would never learn English and I would fail my parents. I never want that; they sacrificed so much for me to be here. I knew I needed to find a way to do better in school, but it seemed so hard to catch up. I was always so far behind my classmates who grew up speaking English. It didn't seem fair, and I was pretty frustrated with school.
>
> A few weeks into the semester, I talked to my neighbor. He had been an ELL student too, but he graduated and even went to college. I thought things hadn't been bad for him, but he told me that he struggled too, especially at first. He said things started getting better when he talked to his math teacher, Ms. C. She got that he was trying even if sometimes language was an issue. Later she helped him with extra tutoring and worked with him so he could catch up in her class.
>
> When I thought about myself and what kind of person I wanted to be, I realized I needed a diploma to get there. Oh, and I also care a lot about being a positive role model for my younger sister. She's ten.
>
> I used to just sit quietly in the back of class and be invisible, but I decide to give school a chance. I started asking more questions and participating in class so my teachers could see I cared. I didn't connect with some of my teachers, but eventually, I found some I could trust and talk about things I cared about. They helped me a lot, and I was able to raise some of my grades. So now I'm a senior, and I'm walking at graduation this spring. My parents are so proud of me, so is my sister, and I'm proud of the progress that I've made. (12th-grade student)

Fourth, students were invited to give advice to future ELL students: to describe to them some of the common challenges ELL students face in the transition to high school and how students can make progress on these challenges. They did so first in writing and then in an audio recording. Thus, students were treated as active contributors in the creation of an intervention for future students (see Eskreis-Winkler et al., 2018). This "saying-is-believing" task facilitates active engagement, internalization, and personalization of the ideas offered to students in the stories (Walton & Cohen, 2007).

Finally, students were asked to nominate up to three educators who were not yet but could be an important source of support for them. They named these individuals and shared what they would like them to know about their goals in school, their values, and who they were as a person and the challenges they faced that the educator could help with.

One teacher nominated by each student received a hand-delivered *See Me, Support Me* letter from the research team and school. This letter closely follows the letter developed for justice-involved youth (Walton et al., 2021). It introduced the student, emphasized the importance of teacher–student relationships for all young people, noted that the student had specifically asked for their support, and included the student's self-introduction (see Figure 2).

As in the lifting the bar exercise, the advice-giving aspect of the exercise was represented as the primary purpose of the activity to students. The self-introduction was treated as secondary, and students were told only that the facilitator "might" be able to share what they wrote with one of the educators they listed. Thus, if the first-listed educator was unavailable for any reason, the facilitator could deliver the letter to a second or third-listed educator without having to go back to the student. These design features aim to avoid raising expectations in students that could not be met, for instance, that the letter would be delivered to a particular educator (or that the person would respond in a particular way).

Procedure

The exercise was described to students, parents, and staff as "Project Achieve," a program to support future ELL students in the transition to high school by learning from current students about their experiences. Thus, it was presented to participants as honorific and empowering rather than remedial. Students were recruited during the second week of their first year of high school in their ELL class. They received a $10 gift card in thanks for participating. Students who expressed interest were given a parent/guardian consent form and informational flier to share with their parents or guardian. They completed the exercise a few days after their signed consent form was received, about 3–4 weeks into the school year. The exercise was offered in both English and Spanish, with all but one student completing the activity in English. Following the exercise, students completed a series of questions (e.g., school trust, belonging) not of focus here given the small sample size and our focus on qualitative outcomes, particularly how students used the exercise and introduced themselves to an educator.

Results

Data Analysis

To explore how students used the *See Me, Support Me* platform, we employ an exploratory design analysis (Syed & Westberg, 2025). To this end, the first author inductively formulated themes upon reviewing students' open-ended responses and subsequently coded each response. Given the sample size, we employ a relatively simple qualitative analysis. Below, we first summarize how students responded to each part of the exercise in turn and report typical responses. Next, we use ChatGPT to examine the key themes in the critical final step: students' self-introductions to an educator.

How Did Students Describe Their Values and Goals?

When invited to say what values were most important to them personally, most students chose values related to their family (82% chose at least one family-related value) and connected these values explicitly to their efforts in school. See Table 1.

How Did Students Describe Challenges in the Transition to High School?

When asked to describe the challenges ELL students face in high school for future ELL students, some students described feeling

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Table 1
Typical Values English Language Learner Students Starting High School Selected as Being Important to Them, Along With Their Open-Ended Elaborations (Study 1)

What's important to you? (value(s) circled)	Why this is important to you?
(Be a good role model for my younger brother or sister; Prepare myself for college; Help support my family)	This is important to me because my oldest brother wasn't a good role model for me and I want to get into college and become a doctor to be a good role model for my little brother. My parents struggle a lot with money and I want to graduate high school, college so I could get into med school and become a doctor to help my parents with money.
(Be a good role model for my younger brother or sister; Prepare myself for college; Help support my family)	It is important to me because being the oldest of my sisters they will be seeing what I do and they will see if what I do is good they will also do it. I want to go to university because I want to be a lawyer to help people who immigrated from Mexico. As a child I saw how my mother suffered to give us a good life and since she does not know how to speak English and cannot speak Spanish too well, it was not easy for her. As a lawyer I will be able to help families that are like my mother because there are Mexicans who get sued for something and go to court and it is difficult for them to obtain a lawyer and they cannot speak English. I want to help support my family as a way of saying thanks for what they gave me.[a]
(Be a good role model for my younger brother or sister; Prepare myself for college; Help support my family)	My first choice was to be a good role model for my younger siblings because I want them to look up to me as someone who has accomplished something big in the family. I also want to prepare myself for college because that's what makes parents proud; going to college and getting a good job. I also want to help support my family because they've been through a lot just for us to live a better life than what they did. They don't want us to suffer. They want us to make the most of it and keep it going for generations.

[a] Original response was provided in Spanish—translated to English by the first author.

trapped in the ELL label: seen as unintelligent and disadvantaged relative to their non-ELL peers and treated differently by teachers and how these perceptions restricted their social and/or academic mobility (36%). Many talked about initial worries they faced due to their ELL background yet recognized a path for growth and success (55%). Fewer talked about language itself as a barrier to success (27%). For examples of student responses, see Table 2.

Table 2
Typical Challenges ELL Students Identified for ELL Students Starting High School (Study 1)

What challenges do ELL students face when coming to high school?
Perceived as unintelligent or disadvantaged in ways that restrict social/academic mobility (36% of responses): Some challenges that ELL students face are that everyone thinks they're not smart and that we can't leave the class.
Worries with route toward progress (55%): As an ELL student I was nervous on coming to high school because I didn't know what to expect. But with the time I realized it wasn't that bad it was all about making friends and getting along with your teacher and the most important thing is paying attention to your class.
Language itself as barrier to integration (27%): Coming to high school as an ELL student is most certainly more difficult than what other fluent English speakers would say because they know a handful of words that ELL students don't know. This gives them an advantage and the ELL students a disadvantage because they won't know what is being talked about and they're obviously going to be confused when doing the assignment.

Note. ELL = English language learner.

How Did Students Introduce Themselves to a Teacher?

In introducing themselves to a teacher of their choosing, ELL students specifically, explicitly, and repeatedly affirmed their commitment to education. All students did so. Table 3 shows typical student introductions.

What Themes Does AI Identify Across Students' Self-Introductions?

To gain a more comprehensive and hands-off understanding of students' self-introductions, we conducted a secondary qualitative analysis using ChatGPT (four on July 20, 2024). We inputted all student responses to the first self-introduction question into ChatGPT and asked, "What are the top 4 most comprehensive themes present in these student responses?" We then followed up by asking ChatGPT to "give a short description of each theme" and finally to "pair each theme with a student response reflective of it." We repeated this process for the second and third self-introduction questions. Tables 4–6 show the themes distilled by ChatGPT from the three student self-introduction questions.

Overall, ChatGPT Found That Students Expressed Academic Ambition, Willingness to Overcome Obstacles, and Resiliency and Determination in Their Academic journey. These Self-Introductions Show Students to Be Committed to School, Deeply Attuned to What They Need to Learn, and Seeking a Partner to Support Their Growth (Table 7).

Discussion

As ELL students entered high school, they described feeling they were seen as less intelligent than non-ELL peers but also that they felt capable of and motivated to achieve growth and improvement. When given the opportunity to introduce themselves to a teacher of their choosing, students actively and explicitly affirmed their commitment to education: They introduced themselves as full of aspirations, facing challenges, but ready to work hard with their teachers to achieve their goals.

Study 2: How Does the *See Me, Support Me* Letter Affect How Teachers See and Respond to an ELL Student?

To begin to address this question, we conducted two experiments, one with a general adult population (pilot study) and one with practicing teachers (Study 2). In each case, we told participants we wanted to understand teachers' thoughts and experiences about ELL students as they entered high school.

Participants were randomly assigned to the "no-letter" condition or the "letter" condition. In the no-letter condition, participants proceeded directly to the outcome measures. In the letter condition, participants were told that the target student had decided to participate in a program called "Project Achieve" to support their transition to high school. They then read a randomly generated letter produced by the student exercise in Study 1, including a self-introduction from one of the students in that study. We explored whether participants who received

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Table 3
What ELL Students Would Like Their Teachers to Know About Them (Study 1)

What would you like your teacher to know about who you are as a person and what is important to you? Write 1–2 things.	What would you like your teacher to know about your goals in school? Write 1–2 things.	What would you like your teacher to know about what is difficult for you in school that you would like to improve, so they can help? Write 1–2 things.
I would like my teacher to know that I am putting my best foot forward even if it doesn't look like am trying hard enough or am not interested. I would also like them to know that I will always try and participate in class even if I know I don't have the right answer.	I would like my teacher to know that this school year I am trying to have at least all A's or all B's which I know will be hard but I am always trying to improve in my school work. Also for them to know that I am trying to grow some bond with all of them.	I would like my teacher to know that if I don't know how to do something I will continue to try it but it does get to chaotic and I am not the most comfortable with asking teachers questions about school work or homework.
Something I would like for my teacher to know about me is that [I] try in specific things more than other subjects, but it doesn't mean I don't care. It just means I'm pushing myself and wanting to do more of it.	I would like my teacher to know that I want to get out of [ELL class]. Its important to me because I want to take an extra class that'll help me more and learn newer things.	Something that is difficult for me in school that I would like to improve is that I can't get myself to like a book until I'm like 75% done with the book. Them making the book sound more fun could definitely help because I don't like to read plain books. I like to read specific ones, like adventures.
I sometimes still struggle with my English and sometimes have a hard time understanding about what their teaching. One thing that is important to me is being able to graduate high school and get into college.	My goal in school is to pass all my classes and get good grades.	I would like my teacher to know that I don't always understand what their saying or teaching.
I would like my teacher to know that I'm not very good at English and that sometimes i get stuck writing what they ask us or don't remember how to pronouns a word.	I would like my teacher's to know that i want to be good at speaking, writing, reading, and listening in English.	I would like my teacher to know that i sometimes get stuck when i speak in English.

Note. ELL = English language learner.

the letter viewed and responded to this student more positively than participants who did not.

The pilot study ($N = 352$) found that the *See Me, Support Me* letter did not affect the level of commitment adults expressed to the student; the means on this measure were consistent with a ceiling effect. However, it did increase the degree of academic motivation adults perceived in the student; how much success they anticipated from them in class, in school, and in society; and the number of mentoring roles they were willing to play for the student. For full results, see Supplemental Table S2.

Study 2 tested the same comparison with practicing teachers. Study 2 was not preregistered as this study was originally conducted as part of an undergraduate honors thesis.

Method

Participants

A total of 246 teachers were randomly assigned to either the letter or the no-letter condition from an online pool, recruited via

Table 4
Themes Distilled by ChatGPT Across Student Responses to "What Would You Like Your Teacher to Know About Who You Are as a Person and What Is Important to You? Write 1–2 Things"

Theme distilled by ChatGPT	Student response reflective of theme as identified by ChatGPT
Academic struggles and goals: Students express difficulties with specific subjects, particularly English, and their challenges in understanding classroom material. They also emphasize their aspirations to graduate high school and pursue higher education.	"I sometimes still struggle with my English and sometimes have a hard time understanding about what they're teaching. One thing that is important to me is being able to graduate high school and get into college."
Personal interests and hobbies: Students share their passions and hobbies, such as sports (soccer, running), music, movies, and video games. These interests highlight their personalities and what they enjoy doing outside of school.	"One important thing that I would like to let my teacher know is that I love sports. Another thing is that I like math and English."
Personal effort and participation: Despite challenges, students highlight their commitment to putting in effort, trying hard, and actively participating in class. They express a desire to improve and be engaged, even when they find it difficult.	"I would like my teacher to know that I am putting my best foot forward even if it doesn't look like I'm trying hard enough or am not interested. I would also like them to know that I will always try and participate in class even if I know I don't have the right answer."
Communication and social behavior: Students describe their communication styles and social behaviors, mentioning tendencies to talk too much or preferring not to talk at all. They also note their outgoing nature and enjoyment of social activities.	"I would like them to know that I talk too much and that I like to go outside and play soccer."

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Table 5

Themes Distilled by ChatGPT Across Student Responses to "What Would You Like Your Teacher to Know About Your Goals in School? Write 1–2 Things"

Theme distilled by ChatGPT	Student response reflective of theme as identified by ChatGPT
Academic achievement: Students emphasize their aim to achieve high grades, pass all their classes, and constantly improve their academic performance, with some setting specific targets such as achieving all A's or B's.	"My goal in school is to pass all my classes and get good grades."
Punctuality and attendance: There is a clear focus on the importance of attending classes regularly and being punctual. Students also stress the need to submit their work on time as part of their academic responsibilities.	"I would like my teachers to know that my goals are to get to all my classes on time and to turn in all my work."
Personal growth and improvement: Students express a desire for self-improvement, particularly in language skills such as speaking, writing, reading, and listening in English. Additionally, some students wish to build stronger relationships with their teachers.	"I would like my teacher's to know that i want to be good at speaking, writing, reading, and listening in English."
Future aspirations and career goals: Several responses reflect long-term ambitions, including graduating from high school and college, securing a better job in the future, and taking additional classes to enhance their learning and career prospects.	"I would like my teacher to know that my goals are study hard and to graduated high school and college to have a better life and job."

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CloudResearch (69.5% female, 29.7% male, 0.4% nonbinary, 0.4% preferred not to disclose; race: 0.8% Asian, 6.1% Black, 5.7% Latine, 0.4% Native, 79.7% White, 5.3% multiracial, 2% selected other or preferred not to disclose; M_{age} = 41.82 years, SD_{age} = 11.58; 33% first-generation college graduates). Teachers reported having taught for an average of 14.25 years (SD = 9.6). Most taught middle school (44%) or high school (56%; some taught at multiple levels). Teachers completed materials online in exchange for a payment of $15. This sample provides 80% power to detect an effect d = 0.35, which is the median effect size observed on scenario measures by Walton et al. (2021, Experiment 2). For a full demographic breakdown, see Supplemental Table S1.

Study Design

As in the pilot study, each participant was randomly assigned to either the no-letter or the letter condition, nested within one of 11 targets corresponding to the students in Study 1. Student's gender, race, and ethnicity matched actual students' identity (as noted, all students were Latine). To preserve anonymity but retain information conveyed through names, first and last names from students in Study 1 were independently randomly assigned to one of the 11 nested responses within gender. All teachers were told that the study examined teachers' thoughts and experiences with ELL students as they transitioned into high school and that they would "read about an actual student who was starting high school as an ELL student" but that the student's name had been changed to protect their identity. They were all told the student's gender and ethnicity, as these are apparent to teachers in the real world. Then they read the following:

> Imagine the school year is starting and you are preparing to teach your normal subjects. One day, you receive word from the principal's office that a new student, who is classified as an English Language

Table 6

Themes Distilled by ChatGPT Across Student Responses to "What Would You Like Your Teacher to Know About What Is Difficult for You in School That You Would Like to Improve, So They Can Help? Write 1–2 Things"

Theme distilled by ChatGPT	Student response reflective of theme as identified by ChatGPT
Difficulty with specific subjects: Students express challenges with particular subjects, notably math and health science, and seek additional support to improve their performance in these areas.	"One thing that is hard for me right now is math and health science."
Communication challenges: Students want to enhance their skills in writing and speaking English. They face difficulties in expressing themselves clearly and fluently, impacting their overall academic performance.	"I would like my teacher to know that I sometimes get stuck when I speak in English."
Attention and concentration issues: Students struggle with maintaining focus and concentration, especially in noisy environments. They require structured guidance, examples, and steps to follow to stay on task and complete their work effectively.	"That I can't concentrate very well if there is a lot of noise and also that I need examples or steps to do things."
Understanding and asking for help: Students often find it hard to understand lessons and are hesitant to ask for help. They continue to try independently but experience chaos and confusion, indicating a need for clearer instructions and a more supportive learning environment.	"I would like my teacher to know that if I don't know how to do something I will continue to try it but it does get too chaotic, and I am not the most comfortable with asking teachers questions about school work or homework. Also, for them to know I don't like presenting or having to stand in a crowd of people."

Table 7
Teacher's Views of an English Language Learner Student Entering School, by Condition (Study 2)

Construct and valence	Condition: no letter, *M* (*SD*)	Condition: letter, *M* (*SD*)	Statistical test
Commitment to the student	4.34 (0.62)	4.42 (0.65)	$t(244) = 0.87$, $p = .385$, $d = 0.11$, 95% CI [−0.14, 0.36]
Perceived motivation of the student in school	3.72 (0.80)	4.08 (0.70)	$t(236) = 3.81$, $p < .001$ $d = 0.49$, 95% CI [0.23, 0.74]
Anticipated success (or failure) of the student (composites)			
In class	3.88 (0.61)	3.96 (0.53)	$t(235) = 1.10$, $p = .275$, $d = 0.14$, 95% CI [−0.11, 0.39]
In school	3.96 (0.58)	4.11 (0.52)	$t(239) = 2.13$, $p = .035$, $d = 0.27$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.52]
In society	4.07 (0.57)	4.09 (0.52)	$t(240) = 0.34$, $p = .731$, $d = 0.04$, 95% CI [−0.21, 0.29]
Response to a minor misbehavior			
Worry about the student's behavior	2.05 (0.89)	2.05 (0.76)	$t(234) = 0.02$ $p = .988$, $d = 0.00$, 95% CI [−0.25, 0.25]
Punitive response	1.82 (1.02)	1.60 (0.91)	$t(238) = -1.73$ $p = .086$, $d = -0.22$, 95% CI [−0.47, 0.03]
Empathy response	4.30 (0.82)	4.50 (0.78)	$t(242) = -1.97$ $p = .050$, $d = 0.25$, 95% CI [0.00, 0.50]
Mentoring roles			
Willingness to play a variety of mentoring roles	4.95 (0.75)	5.13 (0.71)	$t(239) = 2.05$ $p = .041$, $d = 0.26$, 95% CI [−0.01, 0.51]
Opportunity to play a variety of mentoring roles	4.84 (0.84)	5.00 (0.71)	$t(234) = 1.58$ $p = .116$, $d = 0.20$, 95% CI [−0.05, 0.45]
Anticipated significance of a variety of mentoring roles	4.00 (0.67)	4.17 (0.68)	$t(244) = 1.94$ $p = .053$, $d = 0.25$, 95% CI [0.00, 0.50]

Note. All measures are on 1–5 scales except for the willingness and opportunity to play a variety of mentoring roles, which are on 1–6 scales. Controlling for the three baseline demographic conditions that failed randomization, the condition effect on empathic response to a minor classroom misbehavior is significant, $t(241) = -2.23$, $p = .026$, $d = 0.29$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.55], as is the condition effect on anticipated significance to play mentoring roles for student, $t(241) = -1.99$, $p = .048$, $d = 0.22$, 95% CI [0.00, 0.44]. The willingness to play mentoring roles measure was winsorized to mitigate the impact of two outlier responses found through data visualization (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). For complete analyses, see Supplemental Table S4. CI = Confidence interval.

> Learner, is starting at your school. The student's name is [student name], [student gender pronoun] is Latine will be in your class at the start of the school year.

For teachers in the letter condition only, the text continued:

> You also learn that the student has decided to participate in a program called, "Project Achieve," designed to help students in their transition to high school as ELL. You receive a letter from Project Achieve with more information. Please take a moment to read this letter. We'll ask you about it later. To give you time, the submit button will appear after a short delay.

All teachers were then asked a series of open- and close-ended questions to assess their reactions toward the student entering their class. This is a triangulation design, as our goal was to integrate qualitative and quantitative data to triangulate the effects of the letter on teachers' perceptions of ELL students (Syed & Westberg, 2025).

Measures

Measures were assessed in the order listed below.

Open-Ended Responses. Teachers were given space to respond to two open-ended prompts: (a) "Please describe the thoughts and feelings you might have about [student name] entering your class in more detail. How might you react to this news? What would you anticipate about your experiences with [student name] as [he/she/they] comes to your class?" (b) "Please describe what, if anything, in particular you would do as [student name] enters your class."

We examined responses to the first question following a traditional qualitative coding approach. The first author inductively reviewed teachers' spontaneous responses, unaware of their condition assignment, and identified eight preliminary themes across all responses. Informed by prior work on lifting the bar, preliminary themes were then deductively collapsed into the following five themes: (a) a hyper focus on the student's ELL identity, (b) a willful blindness to the student's ELL identity, (c) a willingness to help and support the student, (d) feelings of nervousness or anxiety about supporting the student, and (e) feelings of preparedness to support the student (Walton et al., 2021; see also Ruiz et al., 2025). Two research assistants, also blind to condition, then manually coded for the presence of each theme in each response. Responses were coded in sets of 50–75 items at a time. Disagreements across responses were minimal after the first mediation session. Among the final codes, interrater reliability across all themes had a Cohen's κ of 1.

Closed-Ended Responses. Our primary interest in the close-ended measures was in four core constructs: (a) teachers' commitment to the student and perception of their commitment to school, (b) the success (vs. failure) they anticipated in the student, (c) their response to a minor misbehavior, and (d) their willingness to take on a variety of mentoring roles for the student. Items referring to the target student piped in the student's first name and gender pronoun. Except in three cases where noted, all measures were the same as those in the pilot study. Except where denoted "new," these measures were first developed by Walton et al. (2021, Experiment 2).

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Commitment to the Student. Teachers were asked how responsible they would feel for, how motivated they would feel to help, and how committed they would feel to helping the student as they entered high school (three items; 1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*; α = .84).

Emotions About the Student Entering Their Class. Teachers were asked to select up to four feelings they anticipated they would have in working with the student, among four positive (enthusiastic, glad, hopeful, prepared) and five negative emotions (afraid, annoyed, apprehensive, frustrated, overwhelmed). The order of items was randomized. We examined the percent positive versus negative emotions selected by condition.

Perceived Motivation of the Student in School. Teachers were asked how motivated and how committed they thought the student would be to succeeding in school and how much responsibility they thought the student would take to succeeding in school (three items; 1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*; α = .92).

Anticipated Success (or Failure) and Positive (or Negative) Influence in Class, School, and Society. We used the same items to assess anticipated success or failure items used in the prior research with justice-involved youth (Walton et al., 2021, Experiment 2). However, some of the misbehavior-related items may be less relevant to stereotypes of ELL students.

First, teachers were asked to what extent they thought the student might "disrupt class" (reverse coded), "be a positive influence on other students in class," and "work hard in class" (three items; 1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*; α = .41). Given the low reliability of the composite, we also examined the positive items (α = .69) and negative item separately.

Next, teachers were asked how likely the student would be to succeed and be a positive influence in school (four items: "Be successful in school," "Develop positive relationships with other teachers in school," "Be a danger to others in school," [reverse coded] and "Be suspended in the future" [reverse coded]; 1 = *not at all likely,* 5 = *extremely likely*; α = .46). Again, given the low reliability, we examined the positive items (α = .74) and the negative item separately.

Third, teachers were asked how likely the student would be to succeed and be a positive influence in society in the future (seven items: "Be incarcerated in the future" [reverse coded], "Contribute positively to society," "Be violent in the future" [reverse coded], "Be a good role model for others," "Hold a good job," "Go to college," and "Graduate from college"; 1 = *not at all likely*, *5 = extremely likely*; α = .81). For consistency, we also examined the positive items (α = .92) and negative items (α = .77) separately.

Feelings of Love, Hope, Respect, and Trust. Teachers were asked how much love, hope, respect, and trust they would feel for the student (four items; 1 = *none*, *5 = a great deal*; α = .80).

Nomination to Speak at a Community Event (New). Teachers were asked to imagine their school was holding a community event including student speakers. They were asked how likely they would be to nominate the student "to speak about personal growth" and "how the district can better support youth who face challenges, including starting high school as an ELL student" (two items; 1 = *not at all likely,* 6 = *extremely likely*; α = .85)

Self-Efficacy in Teaching the Student (New). Teachers were asked, "How prepared do you feel to teach [student name]?" "How confident are you that you can build a strong relationship with [student name]?" "How confident are you that you will be able to teach [student name] well?" (1 = *not at all prepared/confident*, 5 = *fully prepared/confident*) and "I would feel adequately supported in working [student name]" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*; α = .84).

Punitive Versus Empathic Response to a Minor Misbehavior. Teachers were asked to imagine that they found student sleeping in class and, when they tried to wake him or her, he or she refused to do their work.

First, teachers were asked how they would respond to this behavior (open ended). Next, they completed several items corresponding to three response types: (a) worry about the student's behavior (two items: "How worried would you be that [student name] will be a problem student?" "How worried would you be that [student name]'s behavior could get worse over time?" 1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*; α = .78), (b) punitive response (one item: "How likely would you be to give [student name] detention?" 1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*), and (c) empathic response (one item: "How likely would you be to talk with [student name] after class about how you can better support [him/her]?" 1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*).

Willingness to Take on Mentorship Roles (New). Teachers were asked how much they would want to take on six different mentoring roles for the student. Each role was named (e.g., "a teacher") and defined (e.g., "to teach [student name] academic skills or knowledge."). The six roles analyzed were a teacher, helpful critic, guide, advocate, cheerleader, and role model (six items; 1 = *not at all*, 6 = *extremely*; α = .90). A seventh role, a friend, was dropped from the scale as scale reliability increases without the item. In the pilot study, this measure was constructed differently: Participants were asked only to identify which roles they would want to play for the student. We used a separate scale for each item here to increase precision.

Teachers were also asked how much they thought they would have an opportunity to play each role for the student (α = .87) and how significant they anticipated each role would be (α = .86) on 5-point scales.

Additional measures were collected from both pilot study and Study 2 participants, which do not focus on the target student. As such, these measures are not reported here but can be accessed in our Supplemental Material, and relevant data can be accessed in our Open Science Framework material Isarraras (2025).

Results

Preliminary Data Analytic Issues

Success of Random Assignment. There were three differences by condition on baseline demographic variables: the percentage of students teachers reported at their school who received free/reduced lunch, grades taught, and teachers' educational attainment (see Supplemental Table S3). For simplicity, we report simple *t* tests. Analyses controlling for these baseline variables yield similar or statistically stronger condition differences, as noted.

Closed-Ended Measures

First, as in the pilot study, there was no effect of condition on teachers' reported commitment to the student, again perhaps because responses in the no-letter condition already approached the top of the scale. However, like general adults in the pilot study, teachers

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perceived greater motivation in the student in school with the letter than without. They also anticipated greater success for the student in school, although the effects for anticipated success in class and in society did not reach significance (see also Supplemental Table S2). Additionally, teachers endorsed a more empathetic response to a minor misbehavior from the student and were more willing to play a variety of mentoring roles for the student. They also saw a marginally greater opportunity to play these mentorship roles and anticipated they would be marginally more significant.

In general, there were no condition effects on the total number of positive versus negative emotions teachers selected as the student entered their class; teachers' feelings of love, hope, respect, and trust for the student; their willingness to nominate the student to speak at a community event; or their self-efficacy for teaching the student. See Supplemental Table S2. Responses on some of these measures approached ceiling.

Spontaneous Open-Ended Responses

The *See Me, Support Me* letter reduced by almost half the percentage of teachers who expressed a hyper focus on the student's ELL status, wanting to know their proficiency in English before engaging with them (cf. Ruiz et al., 2025; Walton et al., 2021). Yet it did not blind teachers to the unique circumstance of ELL students. The letter also reduced the percentage of teachers who expressed a label-blind approach, asserting that they would treat the student as they would any other student. See Table 8. Thus, without the letter, teachers were curious about the student's English fluency yet asserted that they would ignore this circumstance. With the letter, teachers were sensitive to the student's language background but did not overrepresent ELL status in their representation of the student.

Even as the close-ended measure of teachers' commitment to the student did not yield a condition effect, perhaps because of a ceiling effect, teachers were more likely to spontaneously express a willingness to support the student in the letter condition than in the no-letter condition. Interestingly, they were also marginally more likely to express anxiety in supporting the student, perhaps because they anticipated playing a bigger role for the student.

Discussion

The pilot study and Study 2 revealed that the *See Me, Support Me* letter shifted how general adults (pilot study) and practicing teachers (Study 2) viewed and responded to an ELL student entering high school. In both studies, closed-ended measures showed that participants expressed strong commitment to the student regardless of condition. However, those who received the letter perceived the student as more motivated in school, anticipated greater academic success for them, and expressed greater willingness to take on mentoring roles to support them. There were also some differences across studies: In the pilot study only, the letter increased the success general adults anticipated in the student in class and in society as well as in school. In Study 2 only, the letter increased the extent to which teachers said they would respond to a minor misbehavior in an empathic way.

Detailed analysis of teachers' open-ended responses in Study 2 revealed that teachers in the letter condition were more willing to help and support the student. Moreover, the representation of the student and the role teachers would take differed by condition. First, teachers in the no-letter condition both focused more on the student's background and English fluency and were more likely to endorse a label blindness view, asserting that they would treat the student like any other student (cf. Ruiz et al., 2025; Walton et al., 2021). While it may seem like educators just want to evaluate the student's abilities (ELL label hyper focus) or just want to avoid preconceived notions (label blindness), these dual responses suggest a dysregulation. Whether a label dominates student perception or has its basis entirely ignored is unlikely to serve a student well.

Second, even as teachers expressed a strong commitment to the student along the close-ended measure in both conditions, in open-ended responses, teachers in the letter condition were more apt to spontaneously express a willingness to help and support the student. Ultimately, the letter led educators to take a more individualized perspective on the ELL student in response to their articulation of their goals, values, and challenges and to express a willingness to do their part to support the student's success.

General Discussion

It is sometimes assumed that ELL students lack the English fluency needed to fully engage in academically rigorous coursework (Kanno & Kangas, 2014; Kim & García, 2014), or that they are not committed to their educational success (Pettit, 2011). Such preconceptions can lead ELL students to view themselves as inferior or disadvantaged compared with non-ELL students. However, we found that, when given a platform to articulate their commitment to schooling to an educator of their choosing, ELL students making the critical transition to high school expressed a strong motivation to succeed in school, a motivation rooted in their extended family, encompassing the aspirations of their siblings, parents, and future generations as well as themselves. Moreover, ELL students used this platform to express their goals and values directly to an educator who could help them succeed. In turn, we found that educators are receptive to student voice. They responded to students' introduction of their goals, values, and challenges by recognizing students' commitment to education and by seeking out individualized ways to support them.

These findings provide initial evidence that ELL students use the *See Me, Support Me* protocol to introduce themselves in compelling ways (Study 1), which enhance teachers' views of and response to an ELL student (Study 2). Future research may explore whether this shift in students' self-identity, their image in the eyes of a teacher, and a teacher's intention toward them can instigate a spiral of trust and belonging (see Figure 1).

Constraints on Generality and Future Directions

The limitations of the present studies suggest exciting directions for future research. First, while the sample size in Study 1 was sufficient for the study's qualitative objectives and to create stimuli for Study 2, it will be important replicate the *See Me, Support Me* protocol with larger and broader samples to understand the robustness of the patterns observed in students' self-introductions.

Second, while the results suggest the promise of the *See Me, Support Me* protocol to enhance ELL students' experience and outcomes in school, experimental comparisons, ideally well-powered longitudinal field experiments, are necessary to assess potential benefits over time. It is exciting to consider the possibility that creating an opportunity for

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Table 8

Key Themes in Teachers' Spontaneous Open-Ended Responses to an ELL Student as Assessed by Human Coding, by Condition (Study 2)

Theme	Sample response	No-letter condition	Letter condition	Statistical test
ELL hyper focus: An emphasis on the students' English fluency and language background	"My reaction would be to wonder more about [student name's] background—where he is coming from, how long he has been learning English, etc. I would imagine [student name] might be a little shy and uncomfortable in class at first."	35%	18%	$\chi^2(1) = 8.03$, $p = .005$
Label blindness: The expressed intention to treat the student exactly like other students	"[Student name] is my student. I will treat him as I would any other student who walks I to my classroom."	17%	6%	$\chi^2(1) = 6.67$, $p = .01$
Willingness to help and support student	"I feel excited to work with a student who is motivated, having already taken proactive steps in her education. I feel happy to support and help her make decisions and next steps."	39%	55%	$\chi^2(1) = 5.39$, $p = .02$
Feelings of nervousness/anxiousness about supporting the student	"My reaction would be intrigued and open to the opportunity. I have not taught an ELL student before so I would naturally be nervous about how to best support the student."	25%	37%	$\chi^2(1) = 3.29$, $p = .07$
Feelings of preparedness to support student	"I am used to having ELLs arrive to our school, and would have to tell myself patience and support will be key. I would anticipate the need for many visuals, extra wait time and altered assessments."	13%	17%	$\chi^2(2) = 1.43$, $p = .49$

Note. ELL = English language learner.

ELL students to share their goals, values, and challenges with an educator during the pivotal transition to high school might shape their academic trajectory—particularly their relationships with teachers and downstream outcomes such as improved attendance, academic progress, and purpose-driven learning (cf. Bonilla et al., 2021; Goyer et al., 2019; Okonofua, Paunesku, & Walton, 2016; Okonofua et al., 2022; Walton et al., 2021; Yeager et al., 2019). This possibility is particularly compelling given the well-established power of self-fulfilling cycles in teacher–student relationships to drive longitudinal change in student outcomes forward in time, both for good and for ill (Okonofua, Walton, & Eberhardt, 2016; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968)

Third, while Latine students compose the majority of ELLs, ELL students are diverse, including in their racial, linguistic, and cultural background, academic preparation, and immigration circumstances. Therefore, it is important that future research consider how diverse samples use the *See Me, Support Me* platform, as well as to assess longitudinal impacts on ELL students' academic success.

Many students come to school predefined by strong stereotypes and/or administrative categories, not just ELL students. These include foster students; students with refugee backgrounds; students with particular behavioral issues, such as those caught with substance use in school; housing and or food-insecure youth; and students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Many other students simply lack strong relationships with teachers in which they feel seen and supported (Austin et al., 2023; Kraft et al., 2023). What would it mean to create platforms for all youth to be seen and supported by the educators that matter to them? How might this transform how vulnerable youth are viewed in school? How might it affect their course through schooling and life?

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