



Policy Memorandum: From Crisis to Priority: Redesigning Policy to Maintain High-Quality Core Instruction for English Learners

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Who We Are

We are part of the 14% of Latinx school leaders serving Latinx students across California, with a combined 40 years of experience. Through our work, we serve TK-12 students from marginalized communities, including English learners (ELs) from low-income and under-resourced schools. We are Fellows with UnidosUS through the National Institute for Latino School Leaders-California (NILSL-CA), which seeks to bridge the divide between policy and practice and effectively train advocates for policy reform that lead to increased educational outcomes for Latinx students and families.

Summary

Paying close attention to the needs of ELs and other vulnerable students who have been most disadvantaged by the interrupted learning that took place in Spring 2020 will help California build more targeted policies that protect ELs' access to language development. We recommend developing a framework that outlines our state's direct protection of language development and acquisition during times of interrupted learning. Additionally, we request one-time funding for professional development to emphasize research-based approaches that best support ELs in distance learning. Lastly, we request that the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) include in the template a prompt to specify plans about how districts will incorporate English language development through both targeted and content-based instruction.

The Need

ELs faced significant setbacks in their English language development after five or more months without consistent opportunities to listen, speak, write, and read in English.¹ The COVID-19 pandemic shined a spotlight on how existing policies must be strengthened to protect ELs during interrupted education and to leverage the role of state education agencies to coordinate a systemic and equity-focused response.

- The current pandemic has highlighted the need to adequately build teacher capacity to support students' diverse needs.² Professional development needs to emphasize research-based approaches that best support English learners, such as integrated language and content.³
- Research shows that students learn best when teachers acknowledge and build from the linguistic and cultural assets the students bring to school.⁴ Utilizing the EL Roadmap to build capacity at the local education agency (LEA) level would have the most impact.
- In a survey conducted by Californians Together, over 650 educators were asked about their Distance Learning Plan, focusing on English learners. Only 17% reported that most of their ELs participated in distance learning each week, and more than half reported that ELs are not participating weekly.⁵

Background

The population of the United States continues to grow and become more culturally and linguistically diverse, and the public schools are reflecting those trends.⁶ There are approximately 1.148 million ELs in California public schools, which makes up about 19% of the total student enrollment in the state.⁷ The COVID-19 pandemic brought to the surface the educational inequalities that ELs and children from immigrant families experience in U.S. schools, particularly during interrupted education.

As a result, ELs faced significant setbacks in their English language development after five or more months without consistent opportunities to listen, speak, write, and read in English.⁸ Maintaining a fully robust curriculum during the COVID-19 pandemic and future interrupted instruction is critical to ELs' continued language development and academic performance. Districts and school leaders must ensure ELs have access to instruction services for English language development, as required under state and federal laws. Integrated and designated English language development is outlined in the CA English Learner Roadmap Principal Two Element 2.A. Language development occurs in and through subject matter learning and is integrated across the curriculum, including integrated English language development (ELD) and designated ELD, per the English Language Arts and English Language Development Framework.⁹

Executive Order N-56-20, issued by California Governor Gavin Newsom on April 22, 2020, empowered schools to focus on responding to COVID-19 and to provide transparency to their communities.¹⁰ Although executive order N-56-20 empowered schools, it also demonstrated the rash planning efforts that California instituted in the spring semester, with COVID-19 and the Local Continuity and Attendance Plan to provide LEAs with guidelines. These hastily drafted plans have not materialized into support services or instruction tailored to ELs. Districts are not set up to implement these emergency plans. Therefore, an emergency framework can help mitigate these challenges, should the state face interrupted instruction due to a natural disaster such as wildfires or another pandemic.

Our Ask

We believe that for ELs to increase their English language development, more must be done to ensure ELs continue to have equitable access to education during interrupted instruction. Instructional practices supporting English learners during interrupted instruction must be in place. As educators grapple with the heavy lifting of delivering distance learning to ELs, the state and district leaders must provide extensive support and clear guidelines for educating our ELs. We are recommending the following:

- Create a framework through the Department of Education outlining an emergency plan in times of interrupted learning, i.e., natural disaster or global pandemic. These emergency plans, co-developed with key stakeholder groups, will outline steps to guide a county office and district during times of interrupted learning so that they remain operational. In particular, these steps will ensure that students, including the most vulnerable populations, receive the resources and support to access and engage in a robust learning experience across TK-12 content in times of interrupted learning.
- Provide \$800,000 in one-time funding to an English Learner Consortium or lead in the California System of Support that will support professional development and on-demand differentiated training modules focused on distance learning resources that emphasize research-based approaches for EL instruction (designated/integrated ELD) and support students from the most vulnerable populations—ELs, students with disabilities (SWD), and foster youth (FY)—within the general education classrooms. These resources will provide California County Offices of Education and school districts across California with ready-to-go professional development and training modules to support teachers of English learners. They will also complement the distance learning frameworks and instructional plans currently in development through the Sacramento County Office of Education.
- Provide LCAP template revisions, including prompts to specify plans to incorporate English language development through targeted and content-based instruction, as outlined in the CA English Learner Roadmap, Principal Two, Element 2.A.¹¹

Impact

The pandemic and the closures of schools in California have compromised access to a free and appropriate public education for the most vulnerable students. This vulnerable population includes students across the California TK-12 public education system who are English learners, students with disabilities, foster youth, and/or students experiencing homelessness. During the 2019-20 school year, California had 1,148,024 ELs enrolled in schools that were impacted by learning loss.¹² ELs continue to face many setbacks in their English language development due to inconsistent opportunities to access quality core instruction with designated and integrated content support.

- Creating a framework through the California Department of Education (CDE) outlining emergency plans during interrupted learning will ensure students from the most vulnerable populations continue to receive promised state and federal services. This will further ensure that ELs do not fall further behind academically under any interrupted learning or crisis, in addition to supporting County Offices of Education and Districts by saving time and attention that can be redirected to the instructional program provided to 1.148 million ELs in California public schools.
- Ensuring that one-time funding with specific guidelines from the CDE is utilized by the EL Consortium or CA System of Support lead will aid in decreasing an already widening achievement gap for English learners. Specifically, this funding will create professional

learning and training modules designed for building teacher capacity to address the needs of the most vulnerable students. This funding will also provide professional development and on-demand training modules (available free of cost) to educational leaders across county and school districts; the modules can complement the distance learning guidance provided by the Sacramento County Office of Education as mentioned in Senate Bill (SB) 86 (Committee on Budget, 2021), the bill for COVID-19 relief concerning school reopening, reporting, and public health requirements.¹³

- We strongly urge the highest considerations of the outlined recommendations to make the strongest impact on English learners' access to quality core instruction, inclusive of designated and integrated English language development during interrupted instruction.

Endnotes

- 1 Melissa Lazarin and Julie Sugarman, "Educating English Learners during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Policy Ideas for States and School Districts," Migration Policy Institute, September 2020, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/english-learners-covid-19-pandemic-policy-ideas>.
- 2 Anya Hurwitz, "Helping English Learners Succeed Should Be a Top Priority for Schools Amid the Pandemic," EdSource, July 8, 2020, <https://edsources.org/2020/helping-english-learners-succeed-should-be-a-top-priority-for-schools-amid-the-pandemic/635041> (accessed November 28, 2020).
- 3 "ELR Principle Two" California Department of Education, Thursday, September 10, 2020, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/rm/principletwo.asp> (accessed November 28, 2020).
- 4 Lucrecia Santibañez and Ilana Umansky, "English Learners: Charting Their Experiences and Mapping Their Futures in California Schools," Getting Down to Facts, September 2020, accessed December 2, 2020, https://gettingdowntofacts.com/sites/default/files/2018-09/GDTFII_Brief_EnglishLearners.pdf.
- 5 Ashley Aguirre, "Para Iniciar Este Año Escolar en Otoño, Debemos Mirar Hacia Atrás", Californians Together, November 2, 2020, <https://www.californianstogether.org/para-iniciar-este-ano-escolar-en-otono-debemos-mirar-hacia-atras/>.
- 6 Jana Echeverria, Deborah Short, and Kristin Powers, "School Reform and Standards-Based Education: A Model For English Language Learners," The Journal of Educational Research, (2006): 195-210.
- 7 "Facts about English Learners in California - CalEdFacts," California Department of Education, July 09, 2020, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/cb/cefelfacts.asp> (accessed November 28, 2020).
- 8 Sugarman & Lazarin, "Educating English Learners during the COVID-19 Pandemic," 1.
- 9 "ELR Principle Two" California Department of Education,
- 10 "Executive Order 56-20 of April 22, 2020," Executive Department, State of California, accessed April 1, 2021, <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2020/04/23/governor-newsom-issues-executive-order-empowering-schools-to-focus-on-covid-19-response-and-transparency/>.
- 11 California Department of Education, "ELR Principle Two," California Department of Education, English Learner Roadmap, accessed April 1, 2021, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/rm/principletwo.asp>.
- 12 "Facts about English Learners in California - CalEdFacts,"
- 13 California Senate Bill 86, "COVID-19 relief and school reopening, reporting, and public health requirements," initially passed December 16, 2020 and amended February 18, 2021 and March 1, 2021.