



# ACTION GUIDE: TARGETING RESOURCES FROM THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

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For more than 15 months, students, families, and educators across the country have been adjusting to new ways of teaching and learning while navigating a deadly virus, an economic downturn, and social distancing. But the most challenging effects of these crises were borne by communities that were already underserved and under resourced, including immigrant communities, migrant farm worker communities, refugees, and linguistically diverse families. For example, when the heads of households are undocumented, families have had to experience the pandemic with little to no support because of their exclusion from federally funded programs meant to mitigate the challenges, including stimulus relief checks, unemployment insurance, and rent-relief programs.

There are currently 5 million students, accounting for [10%](#) of school-aged children, who are classified as English learners; they are [enrolled in 75% of public schools throughout the United States and their enrollment is growing across rural, suburban, and urban school districts](#). This number does not include the millions of [exited English learners](#), who are proficient in English but continue to face similar challenges as current English learners. In addition, there are about [6.1 million](#) children growing up with an undocumented family member. Of course, there are various states and school districts where these rates are much higher. The pandemic has only heightened a longstanding need to fully support these students and their families.



Through the [American Rescue Plan](#) (ARP) Act, Congress has provided almost \$130 billion in funding to support K-12 education. ARP specifically requires states and districts to set aside at least 5% and 20% of the funding they receive, respectively, to address interrupted learning for students most affected by COVID-19, including English learners and migrant students, and provides some specific funding to support the needs of [students experiencing homelessness](#) and [students with disabilities](#). States and districts have flexibility beyond this and can — and should — spend far more on these purposes, alongside activities that support student physical and mental health, social, emotional, and academic needs. **It's critical that local leaders collaborate with linguistically diverse students, families, and community members to ensure that the needs of English learners are represented in these plans and that an equitable portion of the funds are directed to English learners.**

## THIS GUIDE INCLUDES KEY ACTIONS DISTRICTS CAN TAKE TO SUPPORT ENGLISH LEARNERS

### Meaningfully Engage Linguistically Diverse Families and Communities

If local leaders truly want to ensure that ARP funds are used to build more inclusive and equitable systems than those that existed before COVID-19, they must listen to those directly affected by decisions made about the districts' education system — including students, families, educators, service providers, community members, and advocates. These stakeholders' needs, assets, perspectives, and experiences are as important as other data and information the district may already have.

#### *School district leaders should:*

- ❑ **Partner with immigrant-serving community-based organizations** to draw on their expertise, share resources, and inform families, communities, and advocates about new resources available. This is especially important for districts that have struggled to engage immigrant students and families. These organizations can also help create and sustain feedback loops by assisting with focus groups, forums, survey administration, and working groups to inform district policy and practice. Because they already have a relationship with communities, they are well positioned to gather input, ensure access, and distribute resources, if they are appropriately compensated for this work.
- ❑ **Allocate resources to dismantle barriers to information, participation, and communication for linguistically diverse families.** States, districts, and schools must remove as many barriers to information and participation as possible. These barriers include language access, literacy levels, work schedules, lack of inclusive environments within the school system, and lack of trust for public institutions among families. Traditional methods of mass emails, flyers sent home, or mass phone calls are not enough, especially if only communicated in English. To reach families, consider one-to-one phone calls, text messaging, hotlines, emails, local radio and TV stations, community newsletters, community-based organizations' communication networks, and if safety allows, home visits. Each of these should be conducted in multiple languages, as appropriate to meet the needs of the community. If hosting meetings or resource fairs in person once safe to do so, consider holding events at a variety of times, including outside traditional work hours; providing food, childcare services, and live translation; and offering reimbursement for transportation.
- ❑ **Ensure educators have the information to accommodate families' home languages, and that interpreters and live translation are available for all relevant meetings and events.** Educators should be trained on how to access district prepared materials in common languages spoken in the district, as well as how to arrange qualified interpreters for parents

when meeting with school staff. This must include individual education plan meetings, teacher conferences, and meetings to arrange school mental health supports. Interpreters should also be easily available via school district information hotlines and at school-wide events like PTA meetings and literacy nights to ensure these events are inclusive of all families.

- ❑ **Assign a “navigator” to each family, particularly for students who continue to learn remotely.** Over a year into interrupted schooling, students and families continue to struggle with access to learning and other critical student supports. Navigators could be educators, school support staff, community members, or [even families](#) who may already have trusting relationships with other families. In addition to gathering helpful input and feedback, navigators can refer families to district-operated and external community supports, including mental and physical health supports, opportunities for accelerated learning over the summer, and technology support. When assigning navigators, districts and schools must keep linguistic needs and other family circumstances in mind. For example, [Metro Nashville Public Schools quickly formed a corps of 5,600 navigators](#) from their current district employees to support students and families. All navigators should be compensated for their time; kept up to date on district and community resources; and trained in culturally competent communication, family privacy protections (especially for undocumented or mixed status families), and who to reach out to for additional support, particularly in cases that may pose safety risks to students.
- ❑ **Report transparent and easily accessible information** on the local uses of funds, including data on which groups of students are served by programs supported by these funds. Where immigrant communities and communities of color have lost trust in their children’s school districts, this is a step toward reestablishing a foundation where families know how the district plans to support their children’s specific needs and where to turn to access those services.
- ❑ **Continue to work to ensure all students have access to 1:1 devices and high-speed internet, and promote and provide targeted digital literacy training** for [parents and families](#) of vulnerable students, including families who do not speak English, families with disabilities who may need adaptive technology, and families who are housing insecure. The [unequal access to technology and lower rates of computer literacy](#) among English learners and their families resulted in limited meaningful access to remote virtual learning. These disparities cannot go unaddressed once students return to in-person schooling, especially as the skills of navigating in a virtually connected world are necessary beyond a pandemic context.

## Accelerating Student Learning With Targeted Supports for English learners

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in unfinished instruction that will affect most students, but will have a [disproportionate impact](#) on students from underserved populations. Families, especially in communities with more students from low-income backgrounds, more English learners, and more students of color, continue to have many barriers to participating in distance learning opportunities, for reasons including [inadequate access to technology](#) and competing responsibilities such as jobs or childcare that limit the time available to focus on learning.

### *School district leaders should:*

- ❑ **Provide English learner-specific summer learning opportunities** to ensure that English learners have a chance to meaningfully engage in additional opportunities to accelerate their learning and enrich their out-of-school time while getting targeted support. For example, McAllen ISD in Texas made a [catalog of summer 2021 programs](#) available to students in the district, including a bilingual summer program for kindergarten and first grade students, a language ignition camp combining academic and enrichment activities for English learners in first through seventh grades, and a host of additional acceleration and credit recovery programs, most of which include additional support for migrant students through their migrant program. Any summer programs designed to reach English learners should be free of cost and include targeted outreach consistent with the recommendations above.

- ❑ **Develop an equity-centered plan to use additional federal and state funding to implement evidence-based strategies to accelerate student learning with a focus on the most vulnerable students, engaging a diverse and representative set of stakeholders (including students, families, educators, and advocates) in the process.** These strategies should include [targeted intensive tutoring](#) and [expanded learning time](#). These plans must include [targeted supports](#) that recognize the specific needs of English learners, like targeted language development, and updated plans must address the deep and lasting impacts of interrupted and unfinished instruction. It is also important to ensure ARP funds are used for maximum, equitable impact by strategically coordinating the use of these funds with other federal programs, including Title III.
- ❑ **Ensure that targeted intensive tutoring, expanded learning time, and any other evidence-based programs to accelerate learning are staffed with EL-specialists to provide specific language development support and appropriate materials for English learners.** Just as it is essential for typical educational programming for English learners to include a focus on English language development and advancing content/subject knowledge, “additional” programming should also balance these dual needs.
- ❑ **Provide professional development and ongoing support to school leaders** to implement accelerated learning strategies, including explicit strategies to serve English learners, in ways that will positively impact students, such as using data to identify areas of unfinished learning; training and supervising tutors and/or teachers; selecting curriculum and instructional materials that are aligned to high standards, appropriately challenging for students’ grade level, and culturally sustaining; organizing the core part and any additional time in the school day to maximize learning; and fostering positive relationships between students and adults in the school.
- ❑ **Provide professional development and ongoing support for both general educators and English language development specialists.** This [professional development](#) should focus on how to build strong relationships with English learners, engage in culturally competent communication with students and families, respect the language access rights and education rights of every student and family regardless of immigration status, and incorporate appropriate language and vocabulary development support in every lesson.
- ❑ **Provide sample schedules to help schools** identify ways to maximize and target instructional time for the students who need it the most. [Reports have surfaced](#) that throughout the pandemic, English learners have had limited access to language development support and educators have struggled to address their language needs. Districts should ensure that schedules adequately incorporate evidence-based strategies to address the academic language needs of English learners and provide guidance for schools to incorporate these strategies throughout the school day.
- ❑ **Ensure all data on student engagement and performance is disaggregated by student subgroup, and regularly evaluate and adjust plans** to ensure students are equitably and effectively getting the supports they need to succeed. This includes looking at disaggregated data to ensure supports are advancing outcomes for English learners.

## Providing Students With Social, Emotional, Physical Health, and Mental Health Supports

Throughout the pandemic, [immigrant communities](#) have faced higher risks of contracting the COVID-19 virus, greater likelihoods of developing severe symptoms, and higher rates of mortality all while dealing with disproportionate unemployment, financial strain, and limited access to healthcare. Students growing up in households with undocumented parents and guardians have been especially vulnerable to stress as they have witnessed the anxiety and stress of their caregivers navigating the pandemic without a safety net. This has elevated concerns for the socio-emotional wellbeing of English learners in these families. All students deserve to learn in an environment where they feel they belong, where their [identity is affirmed](#), where they are engaged and have agency in their learning, and where they receive the social, emotional, mental, and physical supports they need to learn, develop, and thrive. That requires considering the specific needs of English learners, so that the impact of the additional challenges their communities have faced throughout the pandemic is mitigated and does not further impede their learning.

### *School district leaders should:*

- ❑ **Protect — and where possible, expand — district funding for whole child, two-generational supports**, including social, emotional, mental, and physical health and development for students and their families. This must include additional funding for school counselors, psychologists, and other mental health providers who are multilingual and equipped to provide trauma-informed care for refugee and immigrant populations, especially in schools within high-need communities that have experienced disproportionate deaths and economic devastation as a result of the pandemic.
- ❑ **Invest in a coordinated districtwide effort — including working with community-based organizations — to identify and proactively re-engage students who are offline**, hard to find, or have left school altogether due to school closures. This includes re-engaging high school students who may have fallen off track to graduate and who need additional support to navigate the transition to college and career. For students who limited or no experience with a formal education (“SIFE”), long-term English learners, and high school newcomer students, these re-engagement efforts should consider the flexibility students may need to pursue an education. Some students are faced with the responsibility of earning an income, so districts should consider the possibility of creating paid internships and apprenticeships as well as flexible school models so that students do not feel that they must choose their current livelihood over their education.
- ❑ **Provide guidance and support, including high-quality professional development, to educators, school leaders, and support staff** to support students’ academic, social, and emotional recovery from the pandemic. This should include guidance on fostering the strengths and assets students have built over the past year, while also providing the supports students need given the challenges they face.

## Building Infrastructure to Support English Learners in the Long Term

School districts have a real opportunity to leverage this federal investment to drive significant change so that schools do not just go back to a world of “pre-COVID” inequity. That includes laying the foundation for [systemic changes](#) that could support English learners far beyond the timelines for using these funds.

### *School district leaders should:*

- ❑ **Use federal ARP funds, as well as state funds, to invest in proven strategies for recruiting and retaining a well prepared, diverse workforce**, including creating pathways for teaching and bilingual teaching that provide incentives and support for immigrant communities. Research shows that teachers of color make a difference for all students, especially [students of color](#), and most states face a [significant shortage of educators](#) qualified to work with English learners. These [strategies](#) could include, for example, building systems to make [educator diversity data](#) visible and actionable to stakeholders, adopting rigorous program approval standards to compel teacher preparation programs to recruit and graduate candidates of color, and setting goals and investing in strategies to increase the racial and linguistic diversity of their educators. This could include identifying opportunities to engage qualified caregivers, teacher candidates, paraprofessionals, and afterschool providers — with the appropriate training, supervision, and support — in accelerated tutoring opportunities to build out the pipeline.
- ❑ **Work with state policymakers to ensure that new culturally and linguistically diverse tutors have access to new or existing bilingual teacher training pathways**. For example, districts should consider approaches like [Portland Public Schools’ Dual Language Teacher Residency Program](#), which allows bilingual adults to acquire a provisional teaching license while they undertake their formal teacher training.
- ❑ **Develop systems to track and monitor the progress of English learners**. Current data collection and reporting on English learners is inconsistent and often paints an incomplete picture of these students’ experience during and after they achieve English proficiency. Updated systems should include tracking students who have exited English learner status through graduation, collecting more information about the type and amount of services English learners are receiving, and further disaggregating data for different groups of English learners (e.g., students with interrupted formal education, migrant students, long-term English learners).