CCNETWORK Regional Comprehensive Center Northwest

Improving English language proficiency among multilingual students

Multilingual students identified as English learners bring valuable personal, linguistic, and cultural assets that can support academic success. The achievements of former English learners demonstrate these strengths.[1] However, educators may find it difficult to identify practices and programs that build on these assets. The Northwest Comprehensive Center created this resource to help Oregon district leaders and educators identify practices and programs that improve English language proficiency (ELP) among multilingual (ML) students. This resource identifies three strategies:

1. Offer extended learning opportunities such as high-dosage tutoring, summer programs, and additional course-taking for secondary school students
2. Provide ML-focused professional learning to teachers and support them to earn English for Speakers of Other Languages endorsements
3. Implement K–12 dual language programs and make sure ML students classified as English learners can access them

For each strategy we address the estimated implementation time, the most appropriate settings and student populations, how to get started, and where you can learn more. Not every strategy will be practical or appropriate for every district or school.

These strategies are supported by rigorous research that is aligned with Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) tiers of evidence. We identify strategies with **STRONG EVIDENCE,** including findings from at least one randomized controlled trial and multiple correlational studies. We also identify strategies with **ML EVIDENCE,** showing positive effects for students classified as English learners. A database of the research is available.

These strategies are not necessarily the most effective ways to improve student outcomes overall. These strategies focus on what districts and schools can do to improve ELP outcomes for ML students.

The Oregon Department of Education's Multilingual Learner Strategic Plan identifies four priority areas to support English learner students and families:

- **Authentic and responsive community engagement and partnerships**
- **Transformative educators and administrators**
- **Systems, instruction, and assessment improvements**
- **Pathways to multilingualism**

Throughout this brief, we use icons to identify the intersection between each strategy and the four priorities.

Extended learning opportunities to improve ELP

Estimated implementation time: 2–3 years



Strategy 1. Offer extended learning opportunities such as high-dosage tutoring, summer programs, and additional course-taking for secondary school students

STRONG EVIDENCE | ML EVIDENCE

Most appropriate settings and student populations. Extended learning opportunities give ML students in grades K–12 additional academic support and opportunities to develop their English language skills. These programs can take place during the summer—helping students continue learning during school breaks[2]—as well as during before or after school programs (e.g., a "zero period"), or as supplemental coursework. ML students who participated in small group, high-impact tutoring paired with tailored curriculum for ML students showed significant gains in English reading proficiency.[3] Similarly, students who participated in summer credit recovery programs showed increased English proficiency gains compared to similar students who did not participate.[4]

How to get started

Districts can review student data to understand which students have access to extended learning opportunities, with particular attention to ML students. Districts may consider bringing together ML specialists, migrant education staff, educators, and community partners to design programs that meet student and community needs, and identify funding and resources to support implementation.

Learn more

The Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project

Closing the Gap through Extended Learning Opportunities

Professional development to improve ELP

Estimated implementation time: 3-plus years



Strategy 2. Provide ML-focused professional learning to educators and support them to earn English for Speakers of Other Languages endorsements ML EVIDENCE

Most appropriate settings and student populations. Research shows that professional development helps teachers improve their practice[5] and that teacher preparation and training are important for providing effective instruction to multilingual learners.[6] Students develop stronger English skills when their teachers receive training on effective practices for teaching MLs.[7] Professional development programs that provide in-depth coursework and teaching practicums which culminate in an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) endorsement are effective to improve language proficiency outcomes among diverse ML students in grades K–12 in multiple settings in Oregon[8] and nationally.[9] Teachers who receive this training and share demographic characteristics with their students—especially race/ethnicity—have larger impacts on ELP.[10]

How to get started

Districts can provide educators with consistent access to high-quality training focused on supporting MLs. They can also prioritize hiring teachers with ESOL or similar endorsements and partner with educator preparation programs to help teachers earn these credentials at no or low cost through state or federal funding. In addition, districts can develop grow-your-own teacher programs using available state and federal funds.

Learn more

Effective Teacher Professional Development

Grow Your Own Educators: A Toolkit for Program Design and Development

Staffing changes to improve ELP

Estimated implementation time: 3-plus years



Strategy 3. Implement K–12 dual language programs and make sure ML students classified as English learners can access them STRONG EVIDENCE | ML EVIDENCE

Most appropriate settings and student populations. Dual language and bilingual programs teach students in both English and a partner language. They help students become skilled in two languages, learn to read and write in both languages, succeed in grade-level schoolwork, and develop the social and cultural skills they need to interact successfully with others. Research shows that these programs improve

ELP and reclassification rates among K–12 students in Oregon and across the country.[11] Dual language programs benefit students who speak the partner language at home (for example, Spanish),[12] students who speak English at home, and students who speak other languages.[13] There is some evidence that the effect of dual language on ELA outcomes may not be readily apparent until late elementary or middle school grades.[14]

How to get started

Districts can explore dual language research and different language allocation models. They can analyze student enrollment data by home language to understand local needs. They can also involve families and community members in planning decisions through a formal advisory board or by providing other ways for them to share ideas and feedback.

Learn more

Guiding Principles for Dual Language Education

Office of English Language Acquisition Dual Language Immersion Playbooks

Endnotes

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