CCNETWORK Regional Comprehensive Center Northwest

Improving graduation 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 evidence-based instructional 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 to increase high school graduation among multilingual (ML) students. This resource identifies four strategies:

1. Offer extended learning opportunities such as high-dosage tutoring and summer programs
2. Provide accelerated learning opportunities such as dual credit and make sure ML students classified as English learners can access them
3. Increase access to quality advising from school counselors
4. 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. All of these strategies have **ML EVIDENCE,** showing impact on students classified as English learners. They do not, however, have especially **STRONG EVIDENCE,** since there are relatively few randomized controlled trials, which require years of follow up. 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 graduation 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 and accelerated learning opportunities to improve graduation

Estimated implementation time: 1–2 years



Strategy 1. Offer extended learning opportunities such as high-dosage tutoring and summer programs ML EVIDENCE

Most appropriate settings and student populations. Extended learning opportunities, including summer learning programs, high-dosage tutoring, before- or after-school programs (e.g., a "zero period"), or supplemental coursework have been shown to improve graduation rates[2] and lead to more students enrolling in advanced high school courses and aspiring to attend college.[3] Among ML students who are newcomers to the United States, participating in summer school is associated with an increase in math, science, and English language arts course taking,[4] all of which lead to higher rates of high school graduation for ML students.



Strategy 2. Provide accelerated learning opportunities such as dual credit and make sure ML students classified as English learners can access them ML EVIDENCE

Most appropriate settings and student populations. Accelerated learning gives high school students the opportunity to earn college credit. This includes dual credit high school-based programs, direct enrollment at a college or university, or programs such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate. Research has found that these programs increase high school graduation and postsecondary education in Oregon[5] and nationally.[6] Overall, ML students benefit from accelerated learning opportunities; however, those currently classified as English learners are less likely to participate in accelerated learning compared to other students.[7] Automatic placement policies for students based on academic proficiency increase participation.[8]

How to get started

Districts can review student data to understand which students have access to extended and accelerated learning opportunities, with particular attention to ML students. Districts may consider bringing together ML specialists, graduation specialists, migrant education staff members, educators, and community partners to design programs that equitably identify students for these programs and that meet student and community needs.

Learn more

How States Are Expanding Quality Summer Learning Opportunities

Closing the Gap Through Extended Learning Opportunities

The Dual Enrollment Playbook: A Guide to Equitable Acceleration for Students

Guide to Launching and Managing a Concurrent Enrollment Program

Staffing changes to improve graduation outcomes

Estimated implementation time: 3-plus years



Strategy 3. Increase access to quality advising from school counselors ML EVIDENCE

Most appropriate settings and student populations. Multiple studies have shown that working with a school counselor can improve academic outcomes,[9] especially among students who are the first in their families to attend college.[10] Low student-to-counselor ratios are important, as research shows worse student outcomes, including lower graduation rates, when the student-to-counselor ratio is too high.[11]

How to get started

To improve student-to-counselor ratios and allow counselors to effectively support students, districts can increase the number of school counselors and prioritize funding for doing so. Districts can also partner with community-based organizations to provide effective and appropriate support for students and families.

Learn more

School Counselor Shortages (see mitigation strategies)

High-Quality College and Career Advising

System changes to improve graduation outcomes

Estimated implementation time: 3-plus years



Strategy 4. Implement K–12 dual language programs and make sure ML students classified as English learners can access them ML EVIDENCE

Most appropriate settings and student populations. Dual language and bilingual programs teach students in both English and a partner language. These programs 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 dual language and bilingual programs improve on-track to graduation and graduation outcomes among K–12 ML students in Oregon.[12] Dual language programs benefit students who speak the partner language at home (for example, Spanish), students who speak English at home, and students who speak other languages.

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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[11] Kearney, C., Akos, P., Domina, T., & Young, Z. (2021), Student-to-school counselor ratios: A meta-analytic review of the evidence. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 99:* 418–428. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcad.12394

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