

Implementing the English Learner Roadmap: Draft Recommendations from Teach Plus California Policy Fellows

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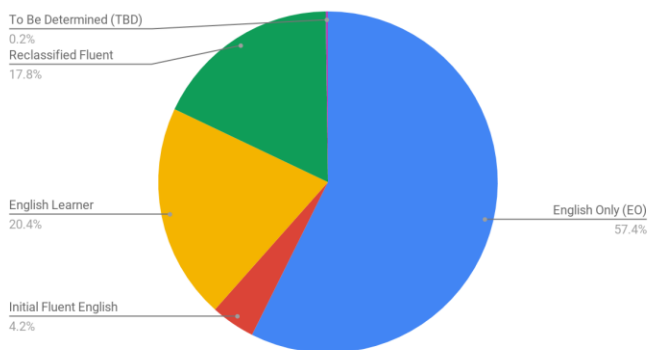
As teachers in schools throughout the state, we are privileged to witness the potential in all our students, particularly those for whom English is not their home language. We like to think of these students not as English learners (ELs), as they are categorized, but as emergent bilingual (EB) students, whose potential has not yet been realized. These students bring social, cultural, and linguistic assets to our classrooms. We also see first-hand the barriers that many of them face in succeeding academically. When looking at the academic outcomes of EL students, we realize this is not just a unique local challenge.

We are a group of six California Teach Plus Policy Fellows who teach and work in schools across the state serving a diverse group of students with a range of life experiences and needs. While we spend most of our time working to ensure that the students in our classrooms have great success, we believe it is also important to advocate for our students by sharing our insights with the policymakers who have the power to shape our education system.

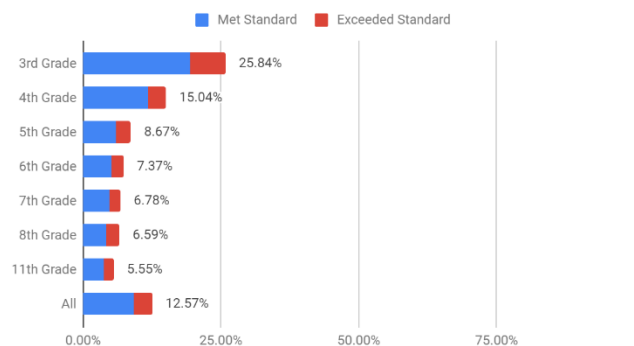
+++++ BACKGROUND +++++

More than 20 percent of California's students, or nearly 1.3 million students, are classified as English learners.¹ Of those students, less than 13 percent of them meet standards in math or English language arts.²

2017-18 Enrollment



2017-18 Math Assessment Results - English Learners



Within the EL population, you will find students with varied needs, including native-born students, newcomers, English learners with learning disabilities, and Long-Term English Learners (LTELs). LTELs include nearly 220,000 students, who have not been reclassified as English-proficient, even after six or more years in our schools. These students are usually struggling academically and do not have access to a full academic curriculum due to their limited literacy skills in English. Subsequently, their academic performance lags their peers.²

Over the last several years, California has adopted policies that focus on our large population of English learners. With the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), districts receive additional funding for supporting EL students. In 2017, the State Board of Education adopted a new policy for ELs, the California English Learner Roadmap: Strengthening Comprehensive Educational Policies, Programs, and Practices for English Learners (EL Roadmap).³ The EL Roadmap provides principles intended to guide all levels of the system towards a coherent and aligned set of practices, services, relationships, and approaches to teaching and learning that together create a powerful, effective, twenty-first century education for our English learners.

- EL Roadmap Guiding Principles**
1. Assets-Oriented and Needs-Responsive Schools
 2. Intellectual Quality of Instruction and Meaningful Access
 3. System Conditions that Support Effectiveness
 4. Alignment and Articulation Within and Across Systems

LCFF and the EL Roadmap established a policy infrastructure for improving support and opportunities for our emergent bilingual students, but we have only begun to look at how that policy is changing what is happening on the ground. Recent research has shown that districts may not be sufficiently or effectively identifying and planning for EL expenditures, and that most LCAPs are weak in identifying specific EL goals, actions, and expenditures.⁴

In 2018, our group of Teach Plus Policy Fellows conducted an analysis of LCAPs of 35 districts with high percentage and high numbers of LTELs. Our research reviewed district plans for specific strategies for supporting LTELs and found that only nine of 35 even mentioned LTELs in their plans, and in most of those cases there were weak and unspecified goals and actions. In one case in which the plan was silent on serving LTELs, the district had 2,205 students who had failed to demonstrate English language proficiency – 14 percent of their entire student population – and yet there were no explicit strategies for supporting these students in their LCAP.

+++++**RECOMMENDATIONS**+++++

While we had hoped that the focus on English Learners in LCFF and the adoption of the English Learner Roadmap would result in changes in opportunities for our emergent bilingual students, policy guidelines without the necessary guidance and fiscal support to implement that policy will not have any impact on our schools and students. Recognizing the need to go beyond resolutions to implement the EL Roadmap, we make the following recommendations for how the state can support districts in implementing the EL Roadmap:

Recommendation 1: Prioritize and invest in professional development for educators in instructional strategies for English learners.

As educators, we know first-hand how important it is to have professional development to provide teachers with the proven strategies to serve our English learner students. The EL Roadmap sets a vision of intellectually-rich and developmentally-appropriate learning experiences, which requires teachers to integrate language development, literacy and content learning. This is a significant shift for many educators. The state should establish a professional development grant program, with priority for districts with identified needs for serving EL students. By establishing a grant program, the state does not undermine the value

of local control but signals the importance of this principle of intellectual quality of instruction and meaningful access for ELs.

Recommendation 2: Expand the Statewide System of Support to grow district capacity in supporting English learners

As Principle 3 of the EL Roadmap outlines, it is important for each level of the school system to have leaders who are knowledgeable and can use data to inform instruction and continuous improvement. But as analysis of current LCAPs demonstrates, districts need more guidance on how to allocate funds effectively on research-based practices for all their EL students, including LTELs. The state should prioritize building the capacity of the local districts to serve ELs through its statewide system of support.

+++++**CONCLUSION**+++++

The adoption of the EL Roadmap represents a shift in how we think about our English learner students. We are pleased that it brings to light the value of our diversity as a state and all the assets our students bring to bear. But a policy framework alone is not enough. If we want to see changes in our students' outcomes, we must invest in translating these principles to action.

With more than 20 percent of our K-12 students categorized as English Learners, improving their academic outcomes is essential for California's future. We call on state leaders to invest intentionally in professional learning and in building the capacity of local districts to implement the EL Roadmap. We believe our students have waited long enough and we urge our state leaders to act now.

+++++**2018-19 Teach Plus California Policy Fellows**+++++

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¹ California Department of Education, Dataquest - Retrieved from: <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dataquest.asp>
² Long-term English learner students: Spotlight on an overlooked population (2016). Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) West at WestEd. Retrieved from: <https://relwest.wested.org/system/resources/236/LTEL-factsheet.pdf?1480559266>
³ English Learner Roadmap (2017). California Department of Education. Retrieved from: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/rm/>
⁴ Umansky, Ilana (2018). State Policies to Advance English Learners' Experiences and Outcomes in California's Schools. Policy Analysis for California Education, Getting Down to Facts II. Retrieved from: https://www.gettingdowntofacts.com/sites/default/files/2018-09/GDTFII_Report_Umansky.pdf