



# HOW CAN DELAWARE SUPPORT ELs IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

There are plenty of bright spots to build on in Delaware, but resources for English learner students (ELs) are inconsistent and aren't keeping pace with the rapidly increasing EL student population.

## ← Five resources that research and Delawareans say matter →



High-quality  
Early Learning



Parent and Family  
Engagement



Rigorous  
Coursework and  
Quality Instruction



Certified, Trained  
Teachers



Student-based  
Funding System

To truly unlock the potential of ALL students, we must examine the whole education system, from early learning through graduation. Here are just a few current policies and practices in Delaware that impact EL students, presented alongside research and national best practices.

## High-Quality Early Learning



### Research says:

**Pre-K is a critical foundation for young ELs to close or prevent achievement gaps, but ELs have less access to quality programs**

- ELs (also called dual language learners when under the age of five) **benefit greatly from access to free pre-K and show greater improvement in learning** at the end of the pre-K year than English-proficient students
- Nationally, access to high-quality preschool is lower for ELs than for non-ELs. Children who **start kindergarten without speaking English rarely catch up with their English-speaking peers**
- ELs who start kindergarten with strong language skills in either English or their native language are **more likely to be on par with their English-fluent peers by the end of elementary school**

### National best practices show:

**Knowing how many young ELs are in the general population and the state, preschool programs are a starting place** for understanding and increasing access, and a foundation for other policies

### In Delaware:

**Local families struggle with limited and varying access to programs with bilingual instruction and supports, and lack of statewide data makes this difficult to quantify**

- **There is no statewide policy to collect information on home language** or count the total ELs enrolled in all pre-K programs or kindergarten programs
- **EL students are less likely than their peers to enter kindergarten with the skills needed for success**, not just language but also cognitive and social emotional skills, indicating the need for increased access to high-quality early learning

# Parent and Family Engagement

## Research says:

Family engagement contributes to better student outcomes for all students, yet parents of ELs face linguistic, socioeconomic, and cultural barriers

- EL parents report receiving less communication from schools than non-EL parents, despite being just as likely as non-EL parents to want their children to succeed in school



## National best practices show:

Parent and family engagement isn't only beneficial, it's required:

- **All schools are federally required to: communicate with families in a language they can understand;** notify families of any program, service or activity communicated to English-speaking families; and provide language assistance services such as translators or interpreters
- Districts that receive federal **Title III funds** must conduct EL parent, family, and community engagement

## In Delaware:

Local families and educators often report frustration over language barriers and engagement. They say:

"I have seen a 4th grader translating for her parents in an official meeting with the school where the topic of discussion was quite serious."

"Since I'm the only bilingual educator on staff, I am called on to interpret and translate often, but I have no formal training or certification to do this."

"We were lucky to have someone in our front office last year who was bilingual and could talk with parents who came in. She left for a job in the private sector."

"Our district subscribes to Language Line—a hugely helpful resource where teachers can call and get access to interpreter immediately. Not everyone has that."

"It is frustrating for everyone involved—parents and teachers."



## The home language is a valuable resource for ELs

- Research shows that proficiency in both languages is more likely if children have sustained exposure in the home to the language that is used less extensively in the community
- Culturally relevant (and relatable) reading materials from an early age are linked to improved reading proficiency
- Families should immerse students in their home language, not abandon it in favor of assimilating to English

# Rigorous Coursework and Quality Instruction

## Research says:

### High-quality English language instruction and academic instruction are necessary to close EL achievement gaps

- General education without support (otherwise known as “sink or swim”) doesn’t work
- EL high school students are less likely to take advanced classes such as dual-credit and Advanced Placement



## National best practices show:

### Multilingual classrooms produce results

- A rapid **increase in bilingual and dual language immersion** classrooms nationally supports recent research, which shows they can produce stronger outcomes than traditional, “pull-out” ESL programs
- Schools should design and resource EL programs based on student need

“My school enrolled me in classes I’d already taken in my old school. When I arrived in the U.S. I should have been in advanced math courses, not college prep.”

- Delaware English learner

“I had an EL student THANK ME for giving her a failing grade in my class. She says that other teachers just pass her through even though she just sits silently in the class, not participating.”

- Delaware general classroom educator



## In Delaware:

### Though bright spots exist, schools struggle to meet student needs

- Academic outcomes for ELs still lag behind peers
- A minority of EL students have access to bilingual and dual language immersion
- Every Student Succeeds Acts (ESSA) offers an opportunity to learn from new data on English learner proficiency

# Certified, Trained Teachers

## Research says:

### Teachers matter most, and ALL teachers benefit from EL training

- Teacher quality is the most important school-based factor in student achievement
- Educators need **specific knowledge and skills (not necessarily knowledge of the ELs native language)** to bring ELs to English proficiency
- ELs perform best when EL teachers are required to be certified and teachers and administrators are trained in **EL instruction methods and cultural competency**



## National best practices show:

### Ensure all teachers are adequately prepared to work with ELs

- **Teacher education programs, state educator certification, and teacher evaluations** should be aligned around the essential knowledge and skills needed to teach ELs

“Local districts may choose to provide training, but is often at the discretion of the educator whether to pursue professional learning. Few general education teachers have the support to pursue actual certification even if they see the benefit.”

- Delaware EL Teacher

## In Delaware:

### There is no statewide requirement for general education teachers to receive EL training. State and local efforts fight to keep up with growing demand for trained educators.

- Schools with enough funding can hire ESL teachers on an **Emergency Certificate**. A limited amount of critical need scholarships is available to cover some coursework for some educators to work towards a Standard Certification.
- Some institutions of higher education have developed coursework. The University of Delaware allows Elementary Teacher Education students to pursue a secondary certification for English as a Second Language.



# EQUITABLE STUDENT-BASED FUNDING ENABLES EQUITABLE ACCESS

Money supports critical pieces of a high-quality education. How our education funding responds to the needs of individual students sets the foundation for how we provide critical services to ELs.

## Student-based Funding System

### Research says:

#### Money matters, especially how it's spent

- School finance reform and additional funding for at risk students can meaningfully improve long-run educational and economic outcomes for students
- Generally speaking, spending increases should be coupled with **transparent reporting** that connects spending and outcomes



### National best practices show:

#### 46 other states provide additional state funding for ELs

- They recognize ELs cost more to educate, typically 25% more or \$1,500 – \$2,000
- Most states (25) allocate money for ELs through per-student weights in their primary funding formula

### In Delaware:

#### With **no state funding dedicated to individual ELs**, quality of service depends on where the student lives

- *"We cobble together local funding and limited flexible state dollars to do the best we can for ELs"*
- *"In my school ELs are classified as special education because at least that way they receive funding for services"*
- *"We hope ELs are also special education so they have funding"*

### ELs and Special Education Identification Concerns

- Districts and charters must not identify that EL students have disabilities simply because of their limited ability to speak English, and research shows that special education services are NOT adequate and often not appropriate for ELs
- Under federal law, ELs who do have disabilities must be provided both language assistance and disability-related services, decided in collaboration between educators and parents
- In practice, however, proper identification of students' educational needs remains an area for additional attention and discussion. Delaware districts and schools, like most of the country, vary widely in how many ELs they classify as special education

## ACT NOW:

**on the five resources that research and Delawareans say matter:**

1. Ask your school how they are supporting ELs
2. Talk to your legislator about how state funding can support ELs
3. See the next fact sheet for other ways to get involved

Visit <http://bit.ly/ELsInDE> for more information on ELs in Delaware including previous fact sheets and sources for this fact sheet.

