



Six Steps Toward ELL Success

MEETING THE ELL CHALLENGE

English proficiency is critical to preparing English Language Learners (ELLs) for strong academic performance, graduation, and subsequent college and career success. At present, ELLs do not succeed at the same rate as their English-speaking peers, and as the number of ELLs grows rapidly, the challenges increase. Closing the achievement gap requires a concerted effort on the part of parents, teachers, administrators, and communities. Together, we can bridge this gap and ensure these students succeed.

Embrace ELL Diversity

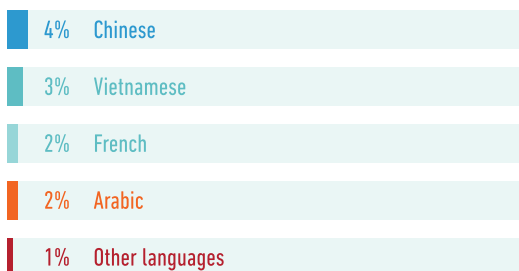
English Language Learners (ELLs) number approximately five million K-12 students who represent hundreds of primary languages, but where the vast majority (approaching 80%) are native Spanish speakers. ELLs are the fastest-growing population of students in the public school system in the U.S. and they are not a monolithic group. They are linguistically, geographically, and culturally diverse, as are their schooling experiences prior to entering U.S. school systems (August & Shanahan, 2006, Hakuta, 2012).

Some ELLs come to the U.S. with high levels of native language literacy and strong foundational skills, which normally transfer to new schooling and language contexts, whereas others—for example, students with interrupted formal education (SIFE)—have a different educational trajectory. ELLs in the U.S. include large numbers of immigrant students, but even larger numbers of native-born students, all of whose bilingualism can and should be a springboard to developing high levels of academic language and content area achievement, if properly nurtured and developed.

Not only are ELLs growing at a rate several times of all other groups, they are also the lowest-performing subgroup nationally. This creates a national crisis to which we must respond.

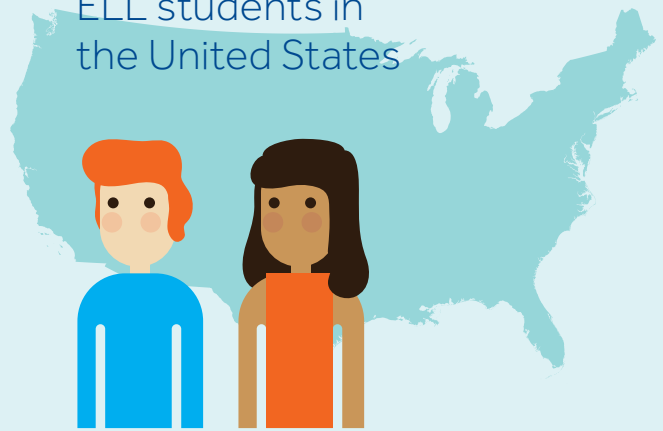
Spanish  71%

Spoken by **71%** ELL Students nationwide.
Other most common languages spoken at home are:



4.7 million

ELL students in the United States



10%
of today's public school enrollment



25%
of predicted enrollment by 2025



Increasing to
40%
by the 2030s

Focus on Academic Achievement

As a nation we have made significant strides toward the equitable and effective education of ELLs over the past several decades and as the numbers of ELLs have grown exponentially. Still, the efficacy of these efforts in terms of ELL student achievement outcomes has been less than what was hoped for and certainly less than what is needed. Over the past fifty years we have gone from having few or no language standards for English Language Learners, to having state and national efforts, including the multi-state WIDA Consortium's standards for ELLs and national TESOL standards for ELLs. Individual states have also designed and adopted their own English Language Development (or ESL, ESOL) standards.

The academic achievement and schooling outcomes for ELLs vary greatly. However, taken as a subgroup of the K-12 population, ELLs have very low achievement outcomes, high dropout rates, low college attendance rates, and even lower college graduation rates (USDOE, 2012). On the 2015 National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) twelfth-grade reading exam, 76 percent of twelfth-grade English learners performed below basic in reading compared

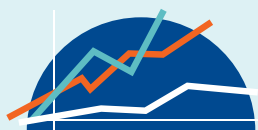
with 26 percent of their non-ELL peers. Only 4 percent of twelfth-grade ELLs scored at or above the proficient level in reading (USDOE, 2015).

The struggle continues for ELLs in other subjects, as evidenced by the 2015 NAEP science assessment, where 86 percent of twelfth-grade ELLs scored below basic; only 2 percent performed at or above the proficient level (USDOE, 2015).

The underachievement of English Language Learners can be understood at least in part by recognizing two factors. In addition to often having some of the least qualified teachers, ELLs (the majority of whom are in urban locations and come from families living in poverty) are concentrated in highly segregated, underfunded schools (de Cohen, Detering & Clewell, 2005; Randolph-McCree & Pristoop, 2005). ELLs also have lower levels of academic achievement than other students with similar socioeconomic levels, indicating that there is a language gap that contributes significantly to an overall gap in achievement (Migdol, 2011).



Two-thirds of ELLs are from low-income families with lower education levels.



ELLs are **the lowest academically performing groups** of students in K-12 schools.



ELLs are **4x more likely to drop out** of high school, compared to English speakers.



76% of twelfth-grade English learners performed below basic in reading



86% of twelfth-grade English learners performed below basic in science

Identify Long Term English Learners

As a group, English Language Learners continue on a trajectory of persistent failure in U.S. schools. In fact, many second- and -third generation adolescent learners who are educated exclusively in the United States continue to struggle with the use of language and literacy in secondary-level academic coursework (Haynes, 2012). Long Term English Learners (LTELs) are unlike ELLs recently arrived in the country as they "have spent most of or all of their lives in the United States and do not share the newcomer's unfamiliarity with the culture or lack of exposure to English" (Olsen, 2012). California is the first state in the nation to pass legislation requiring districts to report how long English Language Learners have been designated as such, following research findings that show many hundreds of thousands of students are failed by their schools and remain ELLs for more than six years, thus making them LTELs.



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Accelerate Learning with EdTech

In their book *Literacy, Technology & Diversity*, Cummins, Brown and Sayers (2007) describe ways in which diverse groups of students, including ELLs, used technology imaginatively to engage cognitively at high levels, to generate knowledge, to analyze issues, to articulate realities, and to achieve academically through expanded notions of what it means to be literate. They further state that the goal of the book is to "sketch a pedagogical blueprint for implementing literacy instruction appropriate for an increasingly diverse Information Age society." Readers are shown a range of vignettes and case studies in which teachers of low income, linguistically diverse students build on students' social and cultural capital while "expanding students' intelligence, imagination and multilingual talents, using technological tools as powerful amplifiers."

This work offers encouraging and powerful examples of the ways in which technology can and should be used to improve student outcomes, while engaging students at the highest levels across multiple literacies (e.g. numerical, critical, cultural, technological). Technology tools, including digital media, can be used to promote equity in education and can serve as a means to provide increased access to content for ELLs and other students, while allowing for learning differences and differentiation in the ways that students can demonstrate learning and express what they know (Haynes, 2012).

Teachers of ELLs are tasked with accelerating learning to the greatest extent possible. Technology can be used to maximize in-school learning through, for example, using a "flipped" pedagogy in which students do some of the foundational and background learning for the lesson using technology, often prior to attending class. Teachers are using a

range of technologies to teach and to communicate about learning with students, including social media, educational and other software, gaming, and various educational “apps.”

When English Language Learning includes the use of technology, students benefit measurably. Strong emphasis can be placed on producing spoken language and building speaking confidence quickly. Oral proficiency increases as students’ pronunciation is guided by real-time aural feedback while they learn English at their own pace.

Technology solutions also allow lesson content to be reinforced in interactive games and activities that make learning fun and interesting. Expanded access using technology enables ELL students to learn and practice at home as well as at school. Facilitating language production in and out of the classroom, and developing oral proficiency using digital tools, allows students to be mainstreamed quicker.

As multilingualism grows, we must find ways to maximize learning for ELLs using technology in ways that are engaging, affordable, and efficacious such that they accelerate language development and content area learning.

EDTECH BENEFITS

FOR STUDENTS



Access to tools that help build foundational language skills



Expand opportunities to build speaking confidence



Practice pronunciation in a safe, friendly environment



Access beyond the classroom

FOR TEACHERS



Complement and reinforce classroom instruction



Empower teachers to individualize instruction



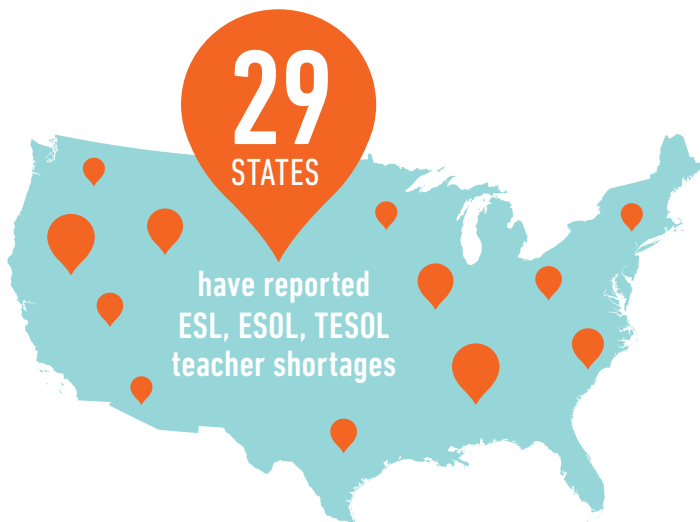
Expand teachers’ instructional reach and content



Enable teachers to focus on higher-order learning

Address the ESL Teacher Deficit

Twenty-nine states have reported ESL, ESOL, TESOL teacher shortages, including eight of the top ten states with the largest ELL populations. Demand for English language instruction continues to rise, so ensuring that enough qualified teachers are available remains a priority. Scholarship and tuition deferment/reimbursement programs have been established to encourage more teachers to fill these critical vacancies.



Educators face many challenges in English language instruction, including ELLs' potentially limited access to technology at home and possible unfamiliarity with technology in general. Overcoming this digital divide requires teachers to be aware of varying degrees of student experience, the state of their school's infrastructure, and even ELLs' ability to understand the vocabulary needed to effectively use technology.

Recognize the Bilingual Advantage

Acknowledging that ELLs may have greater hurdles and certainly must have an accelerated learning curve, the reality is that they will have a competitive advantage over their monolingual classmates in the future if their primary language is maintained and used to promote English language development and academic success. As a nation, we should allow students to capitalize on the cognitive, social, and economic benefits of bilingualism, which is an increasingly important requirement of college and career readiness in our 21st century global economy.



ELLs succeed when teachers, parents, administrators, and communities work in harmony. Teachers can adapt curriculum and methods to accommodate ELLs in and out of the classroom. Parents can increase involvement and communication with teachers. Administrators can allocate resources for teacher training and tools to measure teachers' effectiveness with ELLs. Communities can provide policy support, as well as engage with students by tutoring and volunteering. Working together toward a common goal will go far toward changing the prevailing learning outcomes and assisting ELL students in their quest to achieve academic success at the same rate as their English-proficient peers.

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Notes



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Our scalable, interactive solutions have been used by over 12,000 businesses, 9,000 public sector organizations, and 22,000 education institutions worldwide, and by millions of learners in over 150 countries.

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