

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

HEARING TYPE: X INFORMATION/NO ACTION

DATE: March 12, 2007

SUBJECT: **ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

SERVICE UNIT: State Board of Education
 Edie Harding, Executive Director

PRESENTERS: Dr. Joe Willhoft, Assistant Superintendent for Assessment and Research
 Dr. Alfonso Anaya, Director of Migrant and Bilingual Education
 Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

BACKGROUND:

In response to interest to advocate for the improvement of educational opportunities for English Language Learners (ELL) in our state, we have invited OSPI to present their plans in response to two important questions:

- How will OSPI address the cutscore issue under the Washington Language Proficiency Test II (WLPT-II)?
- What do we know about ELL high school students and their Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) performance and how does OSPI plan to address any issues identified?

Included under this tab is a briefing paper on the state's Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program, which has served English Language Learners since 1979.



WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 26, 2007
TO: State Board of Education Members
FROM: Evelyn Hawkins
RE: English Language Learners (ELLs)

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide you with a brief background on English Language Learners (ELLs) and Washington's Transitional Bilingual Instruction Program (TBIP).

Background on English Language Learners

English language learners are among the most academically at-risk groups in our schools today and their numbers are expected to rise steadily in the near future. Typically, ELLs receive lower grades, score below their classmates on standardized reading and mathematics tests, and are often judged by their teachers as academic "underachievers."

Washington's Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program (TBIP)

Washington's educational system has seen a rise in the percentage of students qualifying for the TBIP from 4.7 percent in 1996-1997 to 7.4 percent in 2005-2006.¹ The state's Transitional Bilingual Instruction Act of 1979, amended in 1984, provides extra state funding to school districts to serve students who have a primary language other than English *and* who have English language skill deficiencies that impair their learning in regular classrooms.² The state, however, is not the only source of revenue for the program. Districts can choose to supplement their state program funds with funds raised at the local level for programs educating ELLs. In addition, various federal programs can be used to support ELLs, including funding from Title I, Title III and programs for migrant, immigrant, and special education. Federal funding, however, is minimal compared to state and local funding.

Despite the relatively minimal federal funding, the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* law has had a considerable impact on the visibility of ELLs. ELLs are a student category for calculating adequate yearly progress (AYP).³ NCLB requires ELLs to meet reading and math proficiency targets (as measured by the Washington Assessment of Student Learning [WASL]). Districts

¹ Information on Washington's ELL population, including the academic programs provided for them are from the OSPI website, in particular, the report *Educating English Language Learners in Washington State. Annual Report of the State Transitional Bilingual Instruction Program, School Year 2004-2005*. Prepared by Dr. Margaret Ho, Interim Director, Migrant & Bilingual Education.

² Beginning in 1979, ELL students were funded along with certain special education students as part of a "special needs" grant. In 1984, funding for the program was set up as a separate allocation. Other program changes were made in the 1984 law, including how eligible students are identified.

³ ELLs who are enrolled in an American school for less than one year are exempted from the state assessment in reading/language arts.

have found the ELL category to be one of the most challenging categories in meeting AYP targets.

The major objective of the TBIP is for students to develop competence in English language skills. Instructional assistance is restricted to students who have very little or no English speaking ability and are in most need of help, as defined by the eligibility requirements.⁴ **RCW 28A.180.010** defines bilingual education as the use of two languages in instruction, English and one other. The non-English language is a bridge, a language the child understands, that can be used by the student to learn core academic concepts while English language skills are being acquired. As a student learns more English, there is a corresponding decrease in the use of the primary language. This is the “transitional” aspect of the program as established in Washington. Although the prescribed program of the TBIP calls for “bilingual instruction,” relatively few students in the program actually receive formal instruction in their primary language. Thus, for the majority of ELLs in the state, their English Language Development (ELD) program is more accurately defined as an ESL program. This reliance on instruction in English rather than in a student’s primary language is common in other states as well.⁵

Program Eligibility. The TBIP serves eligible students in grades K–12.⁶ To be eligible, students must have a primary language other than English *and* their English language skills must be sufficiently deficient or absent to impair learning in an all-English classroom setting. Program funding, however, is intended for those with the greatest need, so not all students who have a primary language other than English may be eligible.

Districts conduct an initial assessment of students’ oral language proficiency to determine program eligibility.⁷ An annual reassessment must be made for an ELL to continue in the program. The state program is intended to provide support services for up to three years. However, the TBIP may serve students for longer than three years if school districts can document that the students remain limited English proficient. Research consistently suggests that learning English in an “academic” setting takes anywhere from four to six years for the majority of ELLs.⁸

The state tests used to measure English language proficiency were first administered in 2002 and are designed to measure proficiency in reading and writing.⁹ Initial results of these tests reveal that reading proficiency is much lower than writing proficiency in the early grades, but not in the middle and high school grades. Over 80 percent of ELLs in grades 9–12 are in the two lowest levels (I and II) in both subjects.¹⁰

⁴ The transitional bilingual instruction program operates under the authority of RCW 28A.180.060 and as detailed in chapter 392-160 of the WAC.

⁵ See *Public Education: Meeting the Needs of Students With Limited English Proficiency*, U.S. General Accounting Office, February 2001.

⁶ Beginning in school year 1997–98, pre-kindergarten students were no longer eligible for bilingual program services

⁷ Districts use the Language Assessment Scales (LAS or Pre-LAS) to determine initial eligibility.

⁸ Hakuta, K., Goto Butler, Y., & Witt, D. (2000). How Long Does It Take English Learners to Attain Proficiency? *University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute Policy Report 2000-01*.

⁹ In November 2001, educators representing various parts of the state unanimously selected the Washington Language Proficiency Test Series as the single test to be used statewide for the annual assessment.

¹⁰ Eligibility ends when a student scores at Level IV on the *reading* portion and Level III or better on the *writing* portion of the Washington Language Proficiency Test (WLPT). Students who meet the reading WASL standard and score at a level slightly below meeting standard on the writing WASL (7 of 12 points in grades 4 and 7 and 13 of 24 points in grade 10) will exit the program.

Students served by the program spoke a total of 177 languages. However, about 66 percent spoke Spanish and another 21 percent spoke one of seven other languages—Russian, Ukrainian, Vietnamese, Korean, Somali, Tagalog, or Cambodian. Some districts had many different languages spoken by ELLs: 28 districts had at least 20 languages spoken by ELLs. On the other hand, many other districts served only ELLs whose primary language is Spanish.

Staffing and Instruction. Nearly all expenditures used to educate ELLs are for staff salaries. Although research has found that students perform better when provided more intensive instruction in their primary language, few students receive this type of instruction. One reason for this is the critical shortage of qualified teachers who are literate in a language other than English. Most instruction for ELLs in Washington is provided by instructional aides, typically in a classroom setting with some ESL instruction. Just over half the teachers in the program have an endorsement in teaching either ESL or bilingual education.

Instructional Strategies and Models. ELL instructional strategies and approaches range from having no instruction in the students' primary languages and providing only ESL instruction to providing instruction over an extended period in both English and the students' primary languages.¹¹ OSPI recommends five instructional models providing services to ELL students during regular school hours: dual-language/dual immersion programs; late exit transitional bilingual education; early exit transitional bilingual education; content-based ESL/sheltered instruction; and English as a second language. OSPI's report to the Legislature on 2004-05 programs included a sixth model—English-as-a-second-language pull-out/push-in—mainly used at the elementary level. Schools are strongly encouraged to select the most effective model given their particular demographics, needs, and resources.

- **Dual-Language/Dual Immersion Programs.** In these programs, language majority and language minority students are instructed together for a minimum of five or six years. The goals of the program are for both groups to become bi-literate, succeed academically, and develop cross-cultural understanding. In Washington, the use of Dual Language programs grew from 5 programs in 2002-2003 to 22 in 2004-2005. Research suggests that dual language programs promote high academic and linguistic gains by native-English students and by students with a primary language other than English.

There are types of dual-language programs. A two-way bilingual program uses two languages to teach students the core curriculum (commonly at the elementary level). Participating students are equally divided between native-English speakers and native speakers of the program's other language. So far in Washington, the other language has been primarily Spanish, although several school districts are currently exploring the possibility of establishing Dual Language programs with English/Vietnamese or English/Tagalog. With a 50/50 linguistic mix of students in place, the school instructs half of the regular curriculum in English and the other half in the other language. In a one-way bilingual program, all students are from the same primary language group.

- **Late-Exit Transitional Bilingual Education.** In late-exit bilingual programs, ELLs receive core content instruction in their native language as they transition into English proficiency

¹¹ See [A National Study of School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students' Long-Term Academic Achievement](http://www.crede.ucsc.edu/research/llaa/1.1_final.html), Wayne P. Thomas and Virginia P. Collier, George Mason University, for the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence, 2002. http://www.crede.ucsc.edu/research/llaa/1.1_final.html

over a five-year period. The degree to which the teacher uses the students' native language is directly proportional to the degree to which the student has acquired English language proficiency. Given Washington teachers' capacity for teaching in a language other than English, this model would most likely serve Spanish speaking students. "Late-Exit" refers to exiting an instructional model using primary language to an instructional model using only English.

- **Early-Exit Transitional Bilingual Education.** Early-Exit Bilingual models are like Late-Exit models (see above) except that they are designed to transition ELLs from their native language to English in the first three-year period of the primary grades.
- **Content-Based English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL)/Sheltered Instruction.** Students are taught entirely in English through ESL techniques. ELLs are kept together with the rest of the students at all times and learn academic curriculum while they are in the process of becoming English proficient. This model requires teachers to have significant training in second language acquisition strategies, however, teachers need to know *only* English for implementing this model.

In the three years from 2002-2003 through 2004-2005, there was an increase in Content-Based ESL programs across the state due primarily to OSPI's efforts to provide technical assistance. Content-Based ESL has been found to be the most effective instructional model for buildings that have considerable numbers of ELLs speaking a variety of languages.

- **English-as-a-Second-Language (at the Secondary Level).** ESL programs are designed to provide English-Language-Development (ELD) students with focused English language development while concurrently taking the regular curriculum in English. ESL-trained teachers use various second language acquisition methods that each are appropriate at certain phases of a student's English language development. Secondary programs typically address the needs of their ELD students by:
 - Two- or three-hour ESL block for beginning English proficiency level students.
 - Delivering core courses in the student's native language where possible.
 - Delaying language intensive core courses (e.g., history) to the second year and moving less language intensive electives to the first year.
 - Pairing ELLs with strong bilingual students in core subjects.
 - Securing textbooks in core subjects in the students' native language.
- **English-as-a-Second-Language Pull-Out/Push-In (mainly used at the Elementary Level).** In this model, ELD students are "pulled" out of their mainstream classrooms for approximately 30-45 minutes each day. A teacher or para-professional provides students with focused assistance in either English language development or core academics. When this assistance is offered in the mainstream classroom, the model is called "Push-In." Washington State has seen a shift in the last three years from serving ELLs in ESL "pull-out/push-in" programs to Content-Based ESL and Dual Language programs. This shift in instructional programs indicates a growing capacity in school districts to offer instruction with expertise in second language acquisition.

The table below shows the number of ELLs served by the instructional programs defined above during the 2004-05 school year:

Instructional Model	Number of Students Served	Percent of Total
Dual Language	1,394	2%
Transitional Bilingual-late exit	4,568	5%
Transitional Bilingual-early exit	3,444	4%
Content-Based English-as-a-Second Language	41,804	48%
ESL (Pull-Out/Push-In)	36,133	41%

Note: Percent based on the total number of ELLs served (87,343) during 2004-05.

Effectiveness of Strategies. In general, studies have found that the more instruction that is provided in the student's primary language, the better the overall academic performance of the student over a long-term period.¹² Experts believe that developing proficiency in one language promotes the development of proficiency in a second language. There are indications that this shift to providing more academic instruction in the student's native language is occurring in our state. However, the shortage of trained staff to provide instruction in many primary languages continues to limit this possibility.

⁹ See *Reading and Second Language Learners—Research Report*, OSPI, April 1999, and *School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students*, Thomas, W. and Collier, V., National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, December 1997. The effects of different instructional approaches may not be seen in the short-term since language acquisition in an academic context is a long-term process.