

NINTH GRADE COUNTS



Strengthening the High School Transition for English Language Learners

A THREE-PART GUIDE

2 Systemic Transition Strategies
English Language Learners
Summer Bridge Programs

Ninth Grade Counts

Strengthening the High School Transition for English Language Learners

Stephen E. Abbott and Mary Hastings
Great Schools Partnership
Summer 2012

This publication was produced under the U.S. Department of Education Contract No. ED-ESE-11-C-0053. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education, and no official endorsement of any product, commodity, service, or enterprise mentioned in this publication is intended or should be inferred.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the following individuals for reviewing early drafts of this tool and providing recommendations for improvement. Their expertise and insights were invaluable.

Patricia DiCerbo, EdD, Research Scientist and ELL Specialist at the George Washington University Center for Equity and Excellence in Education

Elizabeth Jiménez, CEO, GEMAS Consulting

Noni Mendoza-Reis, PhD, Professor and Chair of Educational Leadership at San Jose State University

Laurie Olsen, PhD, Director of the Sobrato Early Academic Language Initiative for English Learners

The content of this guide was also heavily informed by site visits to six schools using promising research-based practices to address the specialized educational needs of their ELL populations. The authors would like to thank the faculty, staff, and students from the following schools for generously offering their time, insights, and expertise: Baldwin Park High School, Baldwin Park, California; Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo High School, Long Beach, California; The ESL Newcomer Academy, Louisville, Kentucky; Iroquois High School, Louisville, Kentucky; Miami Coral Park Senior High School, Miami, Florida; and Robert A. Millikan High School, Long Beach, California.

INTRODUCTION

Why We Created this Guide

During the transition into high school, incoming ninth-grade students face increasingly demanding literacy expectations, academic content, and social challenges—a situation that, without the right support systems in place, often leads to course failures, absences, behavioral problems, and higher dropout rates. In the United States, one in ten ninth-grade students are also English language learners (ELLs)—students who have to navigate the myriad complexities of high school without the benefit of English proficiency. In fact, many of these students are not only in the early stages of English language development, but they may also be recently arrived immigrants or refugees struggling to adjust to a new and bewildering culture. In addition, the school communities that these students enter may have little to no experience with English language learners, and they may not have the infrastructure, programs, resources, or staffing in place to serve ELLs adequately.

While roughly three quarters of English language learners in the United States are native Spanish speakers—the country’s fastest growing ELL population—ELLs represent tremendous linguistic, cultural, and educational diversity. ELLs not only come from every corner of the globe and speak many different languages, but the formal schooling they received in their home country could have been excellent or practically nonexistent—some students may have attended good schools from a young age while others may have never attended a formal school at all. Consequently, school leaders, teachers, guidance counselors, and support specialists must adjust to this tremendous ELL diversity, while also remaining committed to equity, high expectations, and the complicated task of preparing every student for postsecondary success.

During the critical ninth-grade transition, districts and schools establish the academic expectations that will determine whether ELL students catch up with their peers or fall further behind, and they create the academic-support systems that will either exacerbate or begin addressing critical learning gaps. Ninth grade is also the time to provide the foundational services that will engage ELLs, keep them in school, and culminate in a diploma that certifies true readiness for college, careers, and civic life. Developing strong, evidence-based ninth-grade ELL practices and support programs—informed by research and the ongoing monitoring of student performance—is essential for any school that wants its ELL population to succeed.

In every school system, ELLs are a heterogeneous population—they are likely beginning ninth grade with widely disparate levels of academic and language proficiency, even in their native language. Some ELLs will move at a steady pace through the levels of English language development and may even be reclassified as English proficient and move into mainstream academic classes by the time they enter high school. Yet even these students will require ongoing support and monitoring to ensure that they are not only progressing academically and linguistically, but that they are on track to complete high school and graduate prepared for postsecondary learning and careers.

Two ELL population subgroups in particular require additional attention and support when they enter ninth grade: long-term English learners (LTEL) and newcomer students with significantly interrupted formal education (SIFE). For this reason, *Ninth Grade Counts: Strengthening the High School Transition for English Language Learners* includes many strategies specifically designed to promote the success of long-term English language learners and newcomers with interrupted formal education.

Long-term English language learners are students who have been in the American school system for at least six years, but who remain at an intermediate level of English-language proficiency and who need more intensive support in academic language. Typically, these students are orally proficient in English, but they are reading and writing below grade level. In some cases, they even have limited academic literacy in their native language. These students are often placed in mainstream classes by the time they enter high school, but they may continue to struggle academically without appropriate interventions, and they will likely be at a higher risk of failure or dropping out.

Newcomers with interrupted formal education are typically immigrant or refugee students who have been in the United States for one year or less, and who have received a sporadic or incomplete formal education in their home countries. Depending on their personal histories and the educational disruptions they have experienced, these students may not only face significant academic challenges, but they may also be burdened with emotional, psychological, socioeconomic, and cultural obstacles that make their transition into an American high school particularly difficult.

Both long-term and newcomer ELLs enter high school without the academic skills, content knowledge, and language proficiency they will need to succeed in their formal education. In essence, time is running out for these students, and accelerating the development of English and academic-language proficiency is paramount if they are to have any hope of catching up with their English-speaking peers and graduating prepared for postsecondary success.

While all districts and schools must make a commitment to support their ELLs, the scope of that commitment will depend on the size and diversity of their ELL population. At the district and school levels, administrators, teachers, and support specialists will need to determine priorities for long-term and newcomer ELL programs that make the best use of available staffing, resources, and expertise. For example, a district with a smaller number of long-term and newcomer ELLs may need to combine levels of English proficiency to make more efficient use of personnel and space (skillful instructional differentiation will be essential in this setting), while districts with larger long-term and newcomer ELL populations may need to significantly restructure their ninth-grade program to provide the necessary support services these students require, while also ensuring that mainstream teachers acquire the specialized skills essential to successful ELL instruction. In either case, an investment in research-based ELL curricula, professional development for ninth-grade teachers, and support specialists with extensive ELL expertise will pay significant dividends over the long term.

To help schools address the needs of their distinct ELL population, this guide focuses on three features of best practice in ELL support and instruction:

- 1 Systematically using student data to identify and place all incoming ninth-grade ELLs in appropriate language-instruction programs, and continuing to use data analysis and monitoring to assess the efficacy of instruction and intervention strategies throughout the ninth-grade year.
- 2 Creating rigorous support and instructional programs for long-term and newcomer ELLs that intensively focused on academic-language acquisition and learning acceleration to move ELLs quickly toward reclassification and on-grade-level performance.
- 3 Using appropriate translation and communication strategies in the native language of ninth-grade students and parents that address high school orientation, academic expectations, and college readiness.

How to Use the Guide

Ninth Grade Counts is a three-part guide developed to help districts and schools strengthen programs and practices for students entering ninth grade. *Ninth Grade Counts: Strengthening the High School Transition for English Language Learners*, the second installment of the guide, is designed to equip educators with insights and research-based strategies they can use to strengthen support programs for ELLs. The tool includes three main components:

- 1 A self-assessment protocol and reading activity that will help schools engage in small- and large-group discussions about existing programs for ELLs entering ninth grade.
- 2 Four brief vignettes of real high schools that have adopted innovative practices to strengthen their ninth-grade transition strategies for long-term and newcomer ELLs.
- 3 A series of four “planning roadmaps” that will help schools identify best practices, effective leadership strategies, and action-plan priorities for their ninth-grade ELL programs.

The four planning roadmaps (pages 6-13) are organized into the following subsections, each of which features a selection of practices and recommendations:

DISTRICT + SCHOOL CONDITIONS

- Culture + Expectations
- Leadership + Resources
- Professional Development
- Policies + Accountability

PLANNING + ORIENTATION

- Data Collection + Analysis
- Orientation + Summer Programs
- Parent + Family Orientation

INSTRUCTION + INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

- ELL Curriculum + Instruction
- English Language Development
- ELL Interventions + Support
- Newcomer Support Programs

FAMILY + COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Communication + Outreach
- Ongoing Parent Support
- Cultural Inclusion
- Community Connections

Instructions

STEP 1

Begin with the self-assessment activity, which is designed to help faculties engage in a focused discussion about their existing ELL programs and practices. The purpose of the activity is to stimulate thoughtful self-reflection and begin identifying areas in need of improvement.

STEP 2

Review and discuss the selection of best practices in teams listed on the planning roadmaps. Compare the strategies with existing practices in your district or school, and begin to identify where the practices align or diverge. The accompanying vignettes will help you to consider the strategies in context.

STEP 3

Review the column entitled *What Leaders Can Do*, a selection of guidance and recommendations for school leaders overseeing the implementation of ninth-grade ELL programs and improvement work. This step is intended to get administrators, project directors, and teacher-leaders thinking about and discussing the leadership and coordination strategies needed to successfully implement an action plan focused on ELL support during the ninth-grade transition.

STEP 4

Each of the planning roadmaps includes workspace to record effective and ineffective strategies, and to begin mapping out ninth-grade improvement priorities. In the *What's Working* and *What's Not Working* columns, you should only record existing strategies and practices—not plans that have yet to be implemented.

STEP 5

The *Priorities + Next Steps* column is where you can begin to record action-plan activities designed to strengthen the ninth-grade transition for ELLs. Once your district or school has completed the process, you should have a clear set of prioritized ELL strategies and action steps that can be incorporated into a district or school action plan.

A Few Things to Keep in Mind

- 1 The self-assessment and planning process outlined in *Ninth Grade Counts* is not designed to evaluate school performance—it's simply a useful action-planning framework that can help make the complexities of school improvement more manageable for school leaders and educators.
- 2 The three approaches in the self-assessment activity—*Passive*, *Reactive*, and *Proactive*—give schools general profiles of ninth-grade ELL transition programs at distinct stages of development. These descriptions are merely brief, representative illustrations, and schools will likely recognize elements of their organization or culture in all three approaches. Users should avoid attempts to perfectly match their district or school to a specific approach—the purpose of the activity is to encourage faculties to engage in the kind of frank, constructive, forward-looking discussions that move them from where they are to where they want to be.
- 3 The planning roadmaps give school leaders a logical structure and process to follow when addressing critical aspects of ninth-grade success for ELLs, but they are not the only important features to consider when developing effective ELL transition programs. Real schools are not neatly organized into clear-cut categories, education research cannot take every factor into account, and systemic school improvement rarely unfolds according to a perfectly charted step-by-step process. Schools are complex, interdependent learning environments with unique qualities and characteristics, which means that no tool or process—no matter how well devised—will be able to anticipate or address every need.
- 4 Developing effective and appropriate programs for ELLs and their families requires the kind of deep, specialized expertise that is beyond the scope of this guide. For this reason, the authors strongly encourage schools and faculties to take advantage of the bibliography on page 14, which includes a carefully compiled selection of the most recent research and readings on high-impact ELL instruction and support.

GLOSSARY

A variety of common ELL terms and abbreviations are used in this guide and in the ELL community and literature. Below are a few of the more common terms.

Academic Language Development (ALD): A term applied to programs and courses designed to assist limited-English-proficient and non-English-proficient students develop the academic knowledge, skills, and general literacy required for success in formal schooling and mainstream courses.

English Language Development (ELD): A term applied to programs or courses designed to help limited-English-proficient and non-English-proficient students in the development of English-language skills while they continue to acquire essential academic skills in core subject areas.

English Language Learner (ELL): Students who are not native English speakers and who are in the process of acquiring English and academic-language skills.

Limited English Proficiency (LEP): A term applied to students who are not native English speakers and who have not yet acquired the ability to read, write, and speak fluently or effectively in English.

Long-Term English Learner (LTEL): Students who have been in the U.S. school system more than six years, but who have not progressed beyond the intermediate level of English language development.

Newcomer: Students who have been in U.S. school system less than one year, and who may be recently arrived immigrants or refugees. [NOTE: In this guide, the term newcomer always refers to newcomer students with interrupted formal education.]

Significantly Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE): A term applied to students who have received either no formal schooling in their home country, who have received less than four hours per day of formal education, or who have experienced prolonged interruptions in their formal education.

Sheltered Instruction or Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE): A carefully planned teaching approach that utilizes specialized techniques and strategies—such as allowing ELLs to use support materials in their primary language—that help students acquire English proficiency, academic language, and subject-area knowledge.

Self-Assessment Protocol

The following protocol is an opportunity for district and school teams to engage in a self-reflective conversation about ninth-grade ELL programs and transition strategies, particularly strategies for long-term and newcomer ELLs. The goal of the activity is to examine your district or school in terms of three different approaches to ELL instruction and support: *Passive*, *Reactive*, and *Proactive*. When it comes to successful transitions, proactive strategies are essential—a high school that strategically plans and prepares can help all ELL students successfully transition into ninth grade and graduate on time prepared for college, careers, and civic life. We strongly encourage school leaders to include ELLs, their families, and local cultural leaders in this self-assessment activity.

Purpose

To identify strengths and weaknesses in ninth-grade ELL programs as a first step toward more effective instruction and support for all incoming ELLs.

Structure

Break up into groups of four and assign the roles of facilitator, recorder, and timekeeper.

Time

Between 60–90 minutes.

Protocol [Adapted from the School Reform Initiative's Save the Last Word for ME protocol]

- 1 Individually, read the three descriptions—*Passive*, *Reactive*, and *Proactive*—on the following page. Keep in mind that these descriptions are merely concise, illustrative profiles that are based upon a synthesis of observations, research studies, and reports from schools. Your district or school may closely resemble one of the descriptions or it may reflect elements of all three. The goal is to provoke thoughtful, self-reflective discussions about how your school is addressing ELL success in ninth grade. While reading, participants should identify the specific features they believe accurately describe their school or district, and then select two or three passages they consider particularly important.
- 2 When the group is ready, a volunteer reads one passage that he or she has found to be the most significant. [NOTE: The volunteer should not reveal at this time why the passage is significant.]
- 3 After pausing briefly to reflect upon what has been said, the other three participants will have one minute to respond to the selected passage and express what the text made them think about and what questions it raised.
- 4 After the three have spoken, the first participant has three minutes to explain why he or she selected the passage.
- 5 The group conducts four rounds of seven minutes each. The same process is followed until all members have had a turn.
- 6 Participants share their opinions and thoughts about the district or school's general approach to ELL success, making sure to base their comments on concrete evidence, observations, and hard data as much as possible.
- 7 Each group makes a collective determination about where the district or school falls on the passive-reactive-proactive continuum and cites three specific supporting examples that came up during the session. One group member should be the recorder for this exercise. The group may use a flip chart or computer to record the examples.
- 8 The groups reconvene and share their results with the larger group.
- 9 The large-group facilitator collects the results and examples for future planning, making sure that all participants receive copies.

Passive

- The school vision and mission say that all students will be prepared for postsecondary success, but ELLs have significantly lower graduation and college-going rates.
- The ELL program is not fully funded, provides only the minimum services required by law, and has little consistency in assessments, classification criteria, or placements.
- The school does not distinguish among ELL subpopulations and does not provide programming or support to address the specific needs of long-term or newcomer ELLs.
- The school does not have formal systems to collect, analyze, or monitor incoming ninth-grade ELL data.
- The district provides little or no ELL-specific professional development, and ELL instruction and support are largely left to ELL teachers (if there are any).
- Ninth-grade orientation for long-term and newcomer ELLs occurs alongside native English-speaking students, and ELL families are not invited to participate.
- Time is not scheduled during the school day for planning meetings between ninth-grade ELL teachers, support specialists, and mainstream teachers—if such meetings do occur, they happen on the teachers' own time.
- Long-term and newcomer ELLs are given the same instruction, assessments, and coursework as other students, with little or no support in their native language—consequently, learning gaps may persist or widen over time.
- The school does not use student data, progress monitoring, or formative assessment to develop and modify interventions for ELLs; individual ELL teachers provide appropriate interventions when they have time.
- Teachers, advisors, and guidance counselors do not proactively and intentionally engage ELLs and their families in discussions about postsecondary planning and preparation.
- The expectations and messages communicated to long-term and newcomer ELLs are inconsistent across programs, courses, and learning opportunities—consequently, many ELLs simply assume they will not graduate on time.
- Long-term and newcomer ELLs and their families are not formally welcomed into the community by school leaders.
- The district and school are unaware of the community, social-service, and mental-health resources that may be available to enhance support for long-term and newcomer ELLs and their families.

Reactive

- The vision and mission do not honor the school's linguistically diverse student population.
- The ELL program is adequately funded, provides all required services, and has clearly articulated reclassification and placement criteria, but it is not based on current research and effectiveness is not consistently monitored.
- The school recognizes the distinct learning needs of long-term and newcomer ELLs, but it is only beginning to develop research-based programs for these students.
- Individual teachers collect and analyze ninth-grade ELL data but there are no formal institutional systems or expectations.
- The district provides annual professional development opportunities for ninth-grade ELL teachers, but other ninth-grade teachers are not invited to attend and they are not encouraged to earn ELL credentials.
- A full-day orientation is provided to all long-term and newcomer ELLs at the beginning of the ninth grade, and older mentor students are paired with incoming ELLs to help with translation and cultural adjustment.
- Ninth-grade ELL teachers and support specialists meet semi-regularly during the school day to review student-performance data, but they rarely collaborate with mainstream teachers until their students are reclassified.
- Long-term and newcomer ELLs are placed in courses with English-speaking students, but they are often given “watered down” texts, slower-paced instruction, and little or no bilingual support—many ELLs are not promoted to tenth grade.
- The school provides only a few standard interventions for long-term and newcomer ELLs, such as in-school ELL labs, after-school programs, and weekend tutoring.
- Teachers, advisors, and guidance counselors voice the value and importance of postsecondary planning and preparation at the beginning of ninth grade, but few practical resources are provided to ELLs or their families.
- Professional development for school staff has led to relatively consistent expectations and messages being communicated to ELLs, but student interviews and surveys indicate that the ELLs harbor mixed feelings about school.
- The district and school are aware of community and government resources that can help support long-term and newcomer ELLs and their families, and a list of these resources is translated for and distributed to ELL students and parents.

Proactive

- The vision and mission explicitly celebrate the school's multicultural and multilingual student body.
- The school has a research-based ELL program that is fully funded by the district and outside sources, provides a diverse array of support services, and has well articulated ELL policies, placement procedures, and classification criteria.
- The school recognizes the distinct social, emotional, and academic needs of long-term and newcomer ELLs, and all teachers and support specialists employ evidence-based strategies to accelerate language and learning acquisition.
- The school has robust early warning systems to collect, analyze, and monitor data on ELLs prior to and after entering ninth grade.
- The district offers specialized ELL training to all staff, and professional learning communities help teachers embed ELL-specific support strategies in every course.
- Multiday orientation and summer-bridge programs are provided to all incoming long-term and newcomer ELLs to address academic preparation, language development, acculturation, and confidence building.
- The school provides common planning time every week for ELL teachers, support specialists, and mainstream teachers to discuss support strategies for ninth-grade ELLs.
- Long-term and newcomer ELLs are given the same challenging coursework as English-speaking students, and bilingual texts and intensive academic-language support accelerate readiness for tenth grade.
- The school's research-based intervention system includes in-school, after-school, one-on-one, and classroom-embedded support strategies continually monitored to determine effectiveness.
- A variety of programs for ninth-grade ELLs and their families help them plan and prepare for college and careers, including information nights, college visits, and a postsecondary resource center.
- All school staff intentionally and repeatedly emphasize that postsecondary success is attainable for every ELL, and ELLs and their families are regularly surveyed to ensure that the messages are being heard.
- The school works collaboratively with social-service and mental-health organizations to integrate school-based and community-based support for long-term and newcomer ELLs and their families.



BALDWIN PARK HIGH SCHOOL

LEADING FOR ELL SUCCESS

Located 30 miles east of Los Angeles, Baldwin Park School District is 91 percent Latino and 84 percent low income—it ranks second among large, high-poverty districts for its success in closing achievement gaps between white and Latino students. With a population of around 2,300 students, Baldwin Park High School consists of four small learning academies in grades 9–12. Fifteen percent of students are classified as ELLs—most speak Spanish and about one third are in the freshmen class.

When Dr. Luis Cruz took over as principal in 2006, the achievement gap between the ELLs and fluent English speakers was 37 percent on state tests. Beginning with a firm belief that all students, including ELLs, can learn and achieve at high levels, Cruz led a redrafting of the school mission statement. He also created an ELL leadership team to identify and address the pressing needs of ELLs and their families. Inspired by reading *Good to Great*, Cruz led a reexamination of the school's ELL teaching philosophy, emphasizing that all faculty had to be committed to the success of ELLs—no matter what. He also hired an English language development leader, a fluent Spanish-speaking teacher with a passion for ELLs, and a parent liaison from the local community who makes personal calls to ELL parents and creates a welcoming place for them in the school. An experienced guidance counselor who exclusively serves the ELL population closely monitors ninth-grade ELLs, participates in weekly data-analysis sessions, and ensures appropriate placements and interventions. The team also began teacher-to-teacher professional development aimed at improving ELL instructional strategies. The results for ninth-grade ELLs have been significant: reclassifications have increased from 2 percent in 2006 to 15 percent in 2011, meaning that far more ninth-grade ELLs are ready for mainstream classes by tenth grade.

Culture + Expectations

- The district creates a welcoming, inclusive atmosphere for all ELLs and their families—regardless of language or cultural background—while also publicly recognizing the value of a multicultural and multilingual school community.
- The school's public messages and communications explicitly celebrate its multicultural and multilingual student body, including website content, photography, and videos.
- All ELLs are held to the same high standards and rigorous learning expectations as other ninth-grade students.
- School administrators, teachers, and support specialists intentionally and repeatedly encourage—in all programs and courses—the postsecondary aspirations of ELLs, and one-on-one postsecondary planning support is provided to all ELLs and their families throughout the ninth-grade year.
- All school administrators, faculty members, and support specialists recognize that ELLs—and especially long-term and newcomer ELLs—represent unique language and cultural groups that may have specialized social, emotional, and academic needs that will have to be addressed.

Professional Development

- All ninth-grade faculty and support specialists participate in professional development to become either ELL certified or to develop the necessary skills and knowledge required to accelerate English and academic-language development in all courses.
- All ninth-grade administrators, faculty, and support specialists receive research-based ELL professional development that prepares them for the specific linguistic and cultural diversity of incoming ELLs.
- The ninth-grade faculty, guidance counselors, and support specialists are trained in ELL data collection, analysis, and monitoring, including critical data such as assessment results, course-failure rates, and intervention effectiveness.
- All ninth-grade teachers participate in professional learning communities that meet regularly during the school day and, along with other opportunities for collaborative planning and team teaching, provide ongoing professional development related to effective ELL curriculum design and instruction.

Leadership + Resources

- District and school leaders assume primary responsibility for hiring, training, and retaining highly skilled ELL teachers and on-staff support specialists who help build school-wide ELL expertise over time.
- A district ELL center is staffed with dedicated, full-time ELL specialists who provide academic support to ELLs in the district, train teachers in effective ELL instructional strategies, and collect, analyze, and monitor data to keep administrators and teachers informed of ELL performance and progress.
- The ninth-grade ELL program is adequately funded, resourced, and staffed, and it includes critical positions such as curriculum specialists, experienced ELL mentor teachers, and bilingual aides and paraprofessionals.
- District and school leaders establish partnerships with local community organizations, cultural institutions, and postsecondary-education programs to expand, diversify, and improve learning and support opportunities for ELLs and their families.

Policies + Accountability

- The district has a systemic ELL master plan that is reviewed and revised annually in collaboration with teachers, ELLs, families, and local cultural leaders.
- District policies establish clear ELL performance standards and reclassification criteria (which factors in data from statewide assessments, academic achievement, and learning growth), while ensuring that ninth-grade ELL curriculum and instruction remain aligned with the standards outlined in state and district policies.
- Ninth-grade ELL programs are monitored and reviewed throughout the school year, and evidence-based decision-making not only ensures that ELL learning needs are being met, but that successful practices are being expanded and unsuccessful practices are being modified or eliminated.
- School systems and staff responsibilities ensure that ninth-grade ELLs—especially long-term and newcomer ELLs—are regularly observed in learning settings, surveyed about their school experiences, and appropriately advised and consistently counseled by at least one adult in the school.

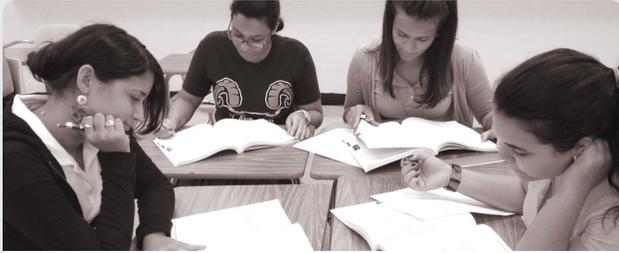
What Leaders Can Do

- ✓ From day one, clearly communicate to all faculty and staff that ELL support strategies will be intensively and unwaveringly focused on helping incoming ELLs achieve reclassification and enter mainstream classes as soon as possible.
- ✓ Ensure that all school programs, instructional practices, and messages promote an “additive” model of ELL education—more learning and increased instructional time—rather than a “subtractive” model—less learning at a slower pace.
- ✓ Use consistent expectations for all students, equitable access to all school programs, and other direct and indirect messaging strategies to clearly and powerfully communicate to incoming ELL students that their success is just as important as that of their native-English speaking peers.
- ✓ Learn—at a minimum—basic welcoming phrases in the native language of incoming ELLs, and actively encourage all faculty members to do the same.
- ✓ Set the tone for other adults in the school—model encouragement, inspiration, and unwavering belief in the ability of all ELLs to succeed in school, graduate on time, and go on to college and rewarding careers.
- ✓ Make ELL success a school-wide priority even if your school has a relatively small population—every ninth-grade teacher and staff member should know who the ELLs are, what level of English-language proficiency they have attained, and how to support and accelerate proficiency in English and academic language.
- ✓ Provide time for faculty and staff members to engage in focused, facilitated dialogue with ELLs and their families, and use this time to solicit feedback on their in-school experiences and how the school’s culture, programs, and instruction could better support ELL achievement.
- ✓ Lead faculty discussions about high expectations for ELLs—what it means in practice and how best to communicate those expectations to students and families.
- ✓ Schedule time for ELL and mainstream teachers to coordinate instruction and share information on ELL progress, particularly data on which ELLs are on target for promotion to tenth grade and which are not.
- ✓ Dedicate a classroom (or two) for the instruction and support of late-entry ELLs that offers English language development classes and academic classes with integrated bilingual support.

What's Working

What's Not Working

Priorities + Next Steps



MIAMI CORAL PARK SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

DATA-DRIVEN ELL INSTRUCTION

Miami Coral Park Senior High School in Miami, Florida, enrolls approximately 2,900 students, including 450 ELLs. In 2011–2012, ninth-grade ELLs represented 25 percent of the school's ELL population. Close to half of the ELLs are in Level 1 English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes, and the remaining students are almost evenly distributed among Levels 2, 3, and 4 (the four levels represent novice to advanced English proficiency in the school system).

Four early release days during the school year are used for data-related professional development, during which faculty and staff learn to analyze assessment data and use it to inform instructional modifications throughout the year. Each ESOL teacher maintains a class binder, an invaluable resource that is used daily to improve support for ELLs. The binder includes color-coded information about the specific language skills students have mastered, the skills for which they need additional support, and the skills that are giving them difficulty. The language skills are aligned with the ESOL course curriculum and the Comprehensive English Language Learning Assessment that students must pass to exit out of the ELL program. Teachers use the binders to personalize instruction, monitor student progress, and flexibly group students according to their learning needs and strengths. Every six weeks—or more frequently if needed—ESOL teachers conduct a data-based discussion with every ELL. Students keep their own notebook to document their learning goals, progress, and challenges. Teachers and administrators also use a discussion protocol to guide these sessions and maintain consistency across all classes, grades, and language levels. Additionally, ESOL teachers use common planning to review data and determine how they can best support specific ELL learning needs.

Data Collection + Analysis

- To make appropriate placements for incoming ELLs, ninth-grade teachers and support specialists collect, analyze, and monitor demographic and academic-performance data of ELLs, including:
 - Important newcomer data, including country of origin, native language, total years of formal schooling, years of schooling received in the United States, years enrolled in current school district, etc.
 - Disaggregated data for high school ELL dropout, grade-promotion, and graduation rates from previous years
 - Data from second-language proficiency assessments, classification assessments, and achievement tests in bilingual programs
 - Ninth-grade entry-level assessments, including English-language proficiency scores, content-area course grades, and test scores
 - Middle school course-success data, grade point averages, grade retentions, attendance rates, disciplinary actions, and special-education status
- The school continuously monitors newcomer ELL performance, social adjustment, and course placements are made in accordance with academic achievement rather than language proficiency.
- The district and school investigate the backgrounds of newcomer ELLs, particularly recently arrived immigrants and refugees, to determine if factors such as resettlement, family reunification, or post-traumatic stress require specialized social services, mental-health resources, or counseling.
- Teachers and support specialists analyze middle-school data for each long-term ELL prior to ninth grade, and all students are interviewed to determine their motivation level (long-term ELLs tend to lose academic motivation over time), emphasize the importance of preparing for postsecondary education and careers, and discuss strategies for accelerating English and academic-language proficiency.
- A comprehensive early warning system monitors academic, demographic, and personal-background data for each incoming long-term and newcomer ELL, and data are provided to all ninth-grade teachers and support specialists in a timely fashion.

Orientation + Summer Programs

- The district and high school provide a dedicated guidance counselor to meet with incoming long-term ELLs during eighth-grade to plan ninth-grade coursework, develop personalized learning plans, and emphasize the importance of postsecondary preparation and education.
- The district and school offer a variety of summer sessions and summer-bridge programs, with specifically designed elements for ELLs, that address learning gaps and accelerate academic preparation and literacy, especially for long-term and newcomer ELLs.
- ELL acculturation and orientation strategies are embedded in all academic programs and courses to address expectations for schoolwork, behavior, attendance, and class participation, as well as any cultural divides that might adversely affect the performance of newcomer students.
- Schools leaders and faculty ensure that incoming ELLs have equitable opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities, sports, academic programs, and social clubs alongside native English speakers, and that mentor students and volunteers are available to help newcomer students with orientation, interpretation, and translation.

Parent + Family Orientation

- Orientation programs for ELL parents and families are offered during eighth grade and over the summer to explain the assessments needed for placement, academic expectations and coursework, school expectations and policies, school resources and opportunities, and postsecondary-planning options and services.
- The district provides transportation, childcare, and translation services for ELL families to facilitate and maximize attendance during orientation programs.
- Multilingual interpreters are available to introduce ELLs and their families to high school leaders and faculty, and to translate as needed.
- Bilingual mentor students from the upper grades are paired with incoming ELLs and their families to give tours of the school, walk students through the first day of classes, make introductions to teachers, and answer any questions ELLs and their parents may have about the school and its academic programs.
- All important introductory documents—such as school policies, academic expectations, graduation requirements, and reclassification criteria—are translated for ELL parents and families.

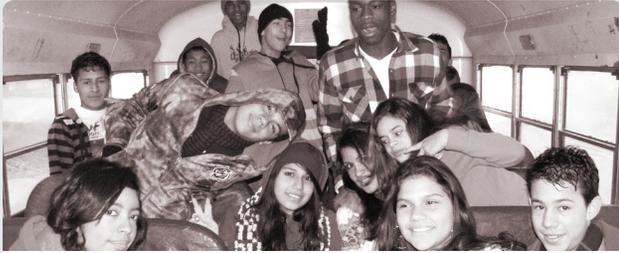
What Leaders Can Do

- ✓ Clearly communicate to all faculty and staff that ELL learning gaps—if left unaddressed—can widen over time and undermine postsecondary preparation, and intentionally foster a sense of urgency among the ninth-grade staff, especially when it comes to learning and language acceleration for long-term and newcomer ELLs.
- ✓ When developing ELL data-monitoring systems, make sure monitoring requirements are reasonable, that staff have adequate training and capacity, and that the system is focused on the early warning indicators that matter most, such as English development, attendance, behavior, and course performance.
- ✓ Create an ELL-specific action plan that is a distinct but integrated part of the school's overall improvement plan, and review and revise it annually to ensure that it is addressing the needs of the ELL population.
- ✓ Develop clearly articulated processes and guidelines that ensure ELL support teams—teachers, advisors, counselors, and support specialists—maintain ongoing communication and contact with ELLs and their parents throughout the transition process.
- ✓ Advocate for all resources needed to support ELL orientation, including translation services, transportation, and release time for guidance counselors and teachers.
- ✓ Be visible and available during orientation and summer-bridge experiences, and lead information sessions for ELLs and their families.
- ✓ Examine academic assessment data from summer-bridge programs in collaboration with guidance counselors and ninth-grade teachers to determine if any modifications in ELL classification or course placement are needed.
- ✓ Proactively encourage and solicit parent participation in ELL parent activities (by making personal calls, sending translated materials home with students, etc.), and clearly and repeatedly communicate to all ELLs and their families that questions and concerns will be heard and addressed at any time throughout the school year.
- ✓ Reassure ELLs and their families that the school will continually monitor ELL performance to ensure appropriate access to support systems.
- ✓ Monitor school-wide ELL participation in co-curricular, extracurricular, athletic, and social activities, and actively encourage the ELL population to take full advantage of the opportunities and experiences offered by the school.

What's Working

What's Not Working

Priorities + Next Steps



ESL NEWCOMER ACADEMY

ACCELERATING NEWCOMER READINESS

The six-year-old ESL Newcomer Academy in Louisville, Kentucky, was created in response to a decade of steady growth in its district's immigrant and refugee population. Located in one of the city's high schools, the academy serves ELLs in grades 6–10 for one to two years, depending upon their previous educational experience and when they arrived in the United States. In 2011–2012, the ninth-grade population consisted of 128 students representing 26 different countries.

Entering ninth-grade ELLs are given introductory reading and math assessments to help determine appropriate course placements. Students have five classes per day, with the exception of Wednesdays when they have an advisory period. In addition to academics, the school provides character education and support for cultural adaptation and academic skills. Students study grade-appropriate curriculum using the same texts as their native English-speaking peers, but a wide variety of supplemental texts are used to support language needs. Students on the interrupted-education team earn elective high school credits, while those on the regular ELL team earn required high school credits. A full-time guidance counselor addresses college and career planning, emotional wellbeing, and referrals for mental-health support, among other services. Students are taught by highly qualified ELL-trained teachers who meet twice a month to review data, student-learning growth, and necessary interventions (although teachers have been meeting on their own time, they are being given common planning time during the school day). In this collaborative community, an intensive curriculum and research-based ELL strategies accelerate English language development and academic preparation. Most Newcomer Academy students transition into a comprehensive middle or high school after one to three semesters, where they continue to receive English language development support in addition to bilingual support in mainstream classrooms.

ELL Curriculum + Instruction

- The primary academic focus of the ninth-grade curriculum is to move ELLs to higher levels of English language proficiency and achieve reclassification for long-term ELLs by the end of ninth grade.
- Long-term ELLs are placed in an intensive English language development course that is paired with an ELA course specifically designed for ELLs.
- As long-term ELLs progress, they are placed in heterogeneous content-area classes (including higher-level classes) alongside English-proficient students, intentionally grouping clusters of ELLs at the same proficiency level.
- Interactive instruction and structured academic talk (Socratic dialogue, protocols, think-pair-share) are a primary focus in ninth-grade ELL classrooms.
- If possible, the school provides “heritage classes”—i.e., native-language classes for ninth-grade long-term and newcomer ELLs that include explicit literacy instruction aligned to English literacy standards and designed for skill transfer across languages.

ELL Interventions + Support

- The school has embraced a “no excuses” approach to ELL support and intervention—everyone accepts ELLs where they are and take responsibility for getting them to where they need to be.
- The school uses an “additive” model of academic support for ELLs that is focused on acculturation, learning acceleration, continual monitoring, and rapid-response interventions designed to quickly move ELLs toward proficiency, reassignment, grade-level performance, and postsecondary preparation.
- Biweekly or monthly data-analysis sessions are used to monitor ELL progress and ninth-grade teachers provide just-in-time interventions and appropriate assignments.
- As soon as there is evidence of need, before-school, after-school, and weekend tutoring sessions—conducted by content-area teachers, ELL teachers, bilingual paraprofessionals, and well-prepared volunteers—are provided to ELLs struggling with English language development, academic language, and course content.

English Language Development

- School leaders and faculty use multiple data points—such as language assessments, observations of students, examples of student work, etc.—to ensure appropriate placements in ninth-grade courses, and placements are quickly modified when new information indicates the need for a change.
- Courses specifically designed for long-term ELLs integrate consistent routines, relationship-building opportunities, acculturation strategies, and support for soft skills such as goal setting, study habits, and organization.
- The school uses multilingual classroom support, tutoring, and mentoring to develop English proficiency, academic language, and content knowledge from the first day of ninth grade.
- ELL, bilingual, and mainstream teachers receive training in sheltered instruction, contrastive analysis, bilingual transfer, and other specialized ELL pedagogical strategies.
- The curriculum materials and academic texts used in ELL courses and support settings are research-based, culturally relevant to ELLs, and both age and grade-level appropriate.

Newcomer Support Programs

- Critical academic baseline data is collected for each newcomer ELL to inform course placements, including recent educational experiences, subjects taken and content covered in previous schools, and assessment and placement-test scores.
- A formal newcomer program, team, or academy helps recently arrived immigrant and refugee students prepare linguistically, academically, and socially for high school.
- Newcomer ELLs with strong educational backgrounds are given strong primary-language support through tutoring, learning technologies, and primary-language texts to supplement academic courses taught in English.
- Newcomer students with significant learning gaps receive basic literacy courses in their primary language.
- Newcomer ELLs have the same ninth-grade course texts used in mainstream courses, but they are given supplemental translations, bilingual materials to support understanding, and interdisciplinary content that integrates content related to their native cultures.
- Newcomer ELLs are given time to acclimate to the new system while special-education staff monitor students with potential learning disabilities.

What Leaders Can Do

- ✓ Hire, train, or designate culturally proficient guidance counselors, social workers, and support specialists who are qualified to attend to the needs of the long-term and newcomer ELL populations and who can navigate local social-service and mental-health resources.
- ✓ Become an ELL instructional leader: visit long-term and newcomer ELL classrooms frequently, interact with students and teachers, observe instructional practices and student-engagement levels, and offer feedback and encouragement to both teachers and students.
- ✓ Emphasize that, for ELLs, speaking, listening, reading, and writing opportunities in every course present an opportunity for English development and academic-language acquisition.
- ✓ Establish school policies and institutional expectations for the use of ELL data, including the development of a robust data system for long-term and newcomer ELLs that (1) records baseline academic and personal-background data upon entry into ninth grade, (2) monitors performance and progress data throughout high school, and (3) utilizes codes to differentiate levels of placement, number of years in United States or other school systems, native-language literacy levels, etc.
- ✓ Avoid placing all five levels of ELL proficiency in a single class; instead, create classes that allow teachers to design lessons that are comprehensible to a more narrow English-language proficiency range.
- ✓ Secure funding from state, district, foundation, or community sources for stipends and training opportunities for bilingual community members who can be used as resources for ELL classroom support, tutoring, and mentoring.
- ✓ Advocate for your state to request a waiver of the four-year graduation cohort requirement to allow for five- or six-year graduation cohorts, especially for newcomer ELLs arriving just before or during ninth grade.
- ✓ Make sure that postsecondary planning for ELLs includes first-hand experiences that make college and career options seem tangible and achievable, such as field trips to local colleges, trade schools, and workplaces, and meetings with collegiate and employer representatives to discuss financial aid, scholarships, internships, and careers.

What's Working

What's Not Working

Priorities + Next Steps



ROBERT A. MILLIKAN HIGH SCHOOL

MOVING LONG-TERM ELLS TOWARD GRADUATION

Robert A. Millikan High School in Long Beach, California, enrolls roughly 4,000 students. In February 2010, the district participated in a long-term ELL study led by Dr. Laurie Olsen for Californians Together. Researchers discovered that 70 percent of the district's ELLs had been English learners for six or more years, and that 52 percent of these students had been classified as ELLs since first grade. According to Pamela Seki, director of program assistance for language minority students, the district chose Millikan and three other high schools to pilot a new program for long-term ELLs. Students who met the pilot criteria were identified at the four sites and specialized training was provided to selected teachers over the summer. In fall 2011, Millikan began offering an intensive English language development class for tenth-grade ELLs—the year that required state graduation tests are taken. The course consists of two periods of carefully sequenced “amplified” English language instruction designed to accelerate oral and written English fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. In the course, ELLs use the same texts, learn the same content, and are held to the same academic expectations as the mainstream tenth-grade students.

In October 2012, students in the pilot program demonstrated a 38 percent improvement on the California English Language Development Test, and they later achieved a 19% improvement on the ELA section of the California High School Exit Examination. It will take a few years before long-term ELL learning gaps are completely closed in Long Beach, but Millikan is leading the way for the other high schools in the district. And based on the program's positive preliminary results, the district began offering a similarly intensive English language development course for ninth-grade ELLs.

Communication + Outreach

- All critical school information is provided in multilingual or translated formats to ELL parents and families throughout the school year, including letters, announcements, and academic progress reports.
- The school's parent, college, or career centers offer all relevant informational materials in multiple languages.
- The school telephone system provides a multilingual option and instructions on how to utilize it, including the automated telephone notification system.
- For open houses, parent meetings, and major school events, translators representing the multicultural ELL community are on hand and available as needed.
- For each distinct ELL culture represented in the school, a designated parent and family liaison connects with families at the beginning of ninth grade, maintains contact throughout the year, responds to questions, offers support and services, and recruits volunteers and translators.

Cultural Inclusion

- Administrators, teachers, and support specialists receive professional development in relevant cultural traditions to improve their general understanding of the cultural histories, social conditions, and customs of the ELL populations represented in the school.
- The school's multicultural and multilingual community is acknowledged and celebrated from day one, and ninth-grade ELLs are invited to post photos, flags, or writings related to their culture in classrooms, hallways, and on the school website.
- Various cultural traditions and holidays are recognized, celebrated, and respected throughout the year, and school spaces are dedicated for the public or private observation of specific cultural practices when appropriate or requested.
- Ninth-grade courses incorporate the knowledge and experiences of ELL students, and course content integrates topics relevant to the ELL cultures represented in the school, such as reading multicultural authors or studying the contributions of international scientists.

Ongoing Parent Support

- ELL parents are included in all decisions regarding their children— they are well informed of the rationale behind school decisions and their right to refuse services or assistance is always respected.
- The district or school sponsors an ELL parent organization that hosts regular meetings to encourage parent involvement in the school, explain academic options for students, discuss postsecondary and career planning, and provide other learning opportunities of value to the ELL parent community.
- Parents are notified at the beginning of ninth grade about their child's ELL placement, and they are regularly kept informed about academic growth through progress reports, phone calls, and conferences.
- Classification and proficiency-level criteria are clearly communicated to all ELL families, and parents are required to participate in and agree with all reclassifications.
- Parents receive translated materials that describe effective strategies for reinforcing or supplementing academic support at home, including local or online resources they can take advantage of.
- The school utilizes community and cultural centers for parent meetings and other school events that may be more geographically convenient or emotionally comfortable for ELL families.

Community Connections

- The district and school have developed a comprehensive list of community resources and regularly collaborates with cultural leaders and institutions that are important to their ELL populations.
- The school seeks and trains bilingual mentors from the community to help motivate and support long-term and newcomer ELLs by providing in-school and at-home tutoring or offering college and career encouragement.
- School leaders actively work to create internship, job-shadowing, and service-learning opportunities in the community that are specifically for long-term and newcomer ELLs.
- The school partners with local colleges, universities, and technical schools to provide ninth-grade ELLs and their families with opportunities to visit college campuses, attend classes, meet students, see living arrangements, and learn about admissions procedures, course requirements, and financial aid.

What Leaders Can Do

- ✓ Commit to the ongoing development of your own multicultural awareness and sensitivity—as a school leader, your attitude, expressions, and actions set the tone for the entire school community.
- ✓ Educate yourself about the cultures, languages, and personal experiences of incoming ninth-grade ELLs, and make it a priority to attend and participate in important cultural events held in the community.
- ✓ Remember that small gestures can make a big difference—for example, block out a time every week to check in on a ninth-grade ELL who may be struggling or to meet with an ELL parent you have not met before.
- ✓ Create opportunities for teachers and staff members to have direct, participatory experiences with the languages, cultures, and families of ELLs.
- ✓ Don't assume you know what ELLs and their families are thinking, feeling, or experiencing—ask them directly and often, and use the feedback you receive to inform your leadership and the design of the school's ELL program.
- ✓ Learn about and take advantage of the preferred communication channels within ELL cultural communities—use community forums and focus groups to stay informed about the concerns, perceptions, and viewpoints of ELL families, and act on useful recommendations to build stronger bridges between the school and ELL cultural communities.
- ✓ Create formal, institutionalized procedures for communicating with ELL parents and families, and use multiple communications strategies—websites, social media, email lists, call systems, the student information system—to keep them informed throughout the year.
- ✓ When communicating with ELLs and their families, recognize that proactive methods and more persistent outreach may be required—always repeat important messages, make personal calls and appeals, actively recruit parent and family participation, and ensure that critical communications have been received and understood.
- ✓ Actively welcome and reach out to local cultural leaders and institutions, solicit their involvement in school decisions and events, and welcome their assistance in facilitating communication and engagement with the ELL community.

What's Working

What's Not Working

Priorities + Next Steps

Useful Research

Anstrom, K., DiCerbo, P., Butler, F., Katz, A., Millet, J., & Rivera, C. (2010). *A review of the literature on academic English: Implications for K-12 English language learners*. Arlington, VA: The George Washington University Center for Equity and Excellence in Education.

Calderón, M. (Ed.) (2012). *Breaking through: Effective instruction and assessment for reaching English learners*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

Dixon, Q., et al. (2012). What we know about second language acquisition: A synthesis from four perspectives. *Review of Educational Research*, 82(1).

Flores, S. M., Batalova, J., & Fix, M. (2012). *The educational trajectories of English-language learners in Texas*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

Genesee, F., Lindholm-Leary, K., Saunders, B., & Christian, D. (2006). *Educating English language learners: A synthesis of research evidence*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hakuta, K., Butler, Y. G., & Witt, D. (2000). How long does it take English learners to attain proficiency? Stanford, CA: University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute.

Lee, S. J. (2012). New talk about ELL students. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 93(8), 66-69.

Malone, H. J. (February 8, 2012). Dictionary girl. *Education Week*, 12(6).

Maxwell, L. (March 28, 2012) 'Dual' classes see growth in popularity. *Education Week*, 31(26).

Mendoza-Reis, N. & Flores, B. (in press). Improving principal quality for schools with English learners: Reculturing instructional leadership. In Portes, P. & Salas, S. (Eds.) *U.S. Latinos in K-12 education: Seminal research-based directions for change we can believe in*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Mendoza-Reis, N. & Kay, S. (2007). Incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy into the teaching of science: The role of the principal. *Electronic Journal of Literacy Through Science*, 6(1).

Menken, K. & Kleyn, T. (2009). The difficult road for long-term English learners. *Educational Leadership*, 66(7).

National High School Center. (2009). *Educating English language learners at the high school level: A coherent approach to district and school-level support*. Washington, DC: Author.

Olsen, L. (2010). *Reparable harm: Fulfilling the unkept promise of educational opportunity for California's long term English learners*. Long Beach, CA: Californians Together.

Olsen, L. (2012). *Secondary school courses designed to address the language needs and academic gaps of long-term English learners*. Long Beach, CA: Californians Together.

Parrish, T. B., Merickel, A., Perez, M., Linqanti, R., Socias, M., Spain, A., et al. (2006). *Effects of the implementation of Proposition 227 on the education of English learners, K-12*. Palo Alto, CA: American Institutes for Research.

Schleppegrell, M. J. & O'Hallaron, C. L. (2011). Teaching academic language in L2 secondary settings. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31, 3-18.

Short, D. J., & Boyson, B. A. (2012). *Helping newcomer students succeed in secondary schools and beyond*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Short, D., & Fitzsimmons, S. (2007). *Double the work: Challenges and solutions to acquiring language and academic literacy for adolescent English language learners*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

[NOTE: All the articles and resources listed above are available online at no cost, except for the two books, which can be found at your local university library or borrowed through interlibrary loan.]

About the Smaller Learning Communities Program

The U.S. Department of Education Smaller Learning Communities Program awards discretionary grants for up to 60 months to local educational agencies to support the implementation of smaller learning communities and activities designed to improve student academic achievement in large public high schools with enrollments of 1,000 or more students. Smaller learning communities include structures such as freshman academies, multi-grade academies organized around career interests or themes, "houses" in which small groups of students remain together throughout high school, autonomous schools-within-a-school, and personalization strategies such as student advisories, family advocate systems, and mentoring programs.

In May 2007, the U.S. Department of Education established a new absolute priority for the program that focuses grant assistance on projects that are part of a larger, comprehensive effort to prepare all students to succeed in postsecondary education and careers without the need for remediation.

The Smaller Learning Communities program is authorized under Title V, Part D, Subpart 4 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) (20 U.S.C. 7249), as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

For more information

ed.gov/programs/slcp