

ENGLISH LEARNERS

SUMMER 2019 | BRIEF 1

WHO IS THIS LEARNER?

English learners (ELs) are a diverse group of students representing different languages, cultures, ethnicities, learning abilities and nationalities. Oklahoma has more Hispanic and Latino students than any other language group, and aside from English, Spanish is the most commonly spoken language in the state.

It is difficult for ELs to learn classroom material at the same time they are learning English as a second language. A basic understanding of conversational English is not enough for students whose native language is other than English; all students deserve an academic background that equips them for a successful future.

Despite the difficulty ELs face in navigating school while learning a new language, they are a tremendous asset when their academic potential is unlocked. In fact, research shows that former ELs who have become proficient in English and become bilingual or multilingual outperform all other student groups on every academic measure.

WHY IT MATTERS

- English learners and former ELs make up 12 percent of Oklahoma's student population.
- Spanish is the largest language group, spoken by 78 percent of Oklahoma ELs.
- Other prominent language groups in Oklahoma include Cherokee, Vietnamese, Hmong, Chinese, Marshallese, Arabic and Zomi.
- Of Oklahoma's approximately 540 districts, 311 serve English learners.
- Approximately 73 percent of EL students in the state are served within the state's two major metro areas.
- 54,033 Oklahoma students identified as English learners in spring 2019.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- **Recognize** that second language acquisition is a gradual developmental process and is built on students' knowledge and skill in their native language.
- **Provide** authentic opportunities to use language in a nonthreatening environment.
- **Encourage** students to read in their native language. Strong native language reading skills lift achievement in English acquisition.
- **Foster** English language acquisition and whole-class engagement by using dramatic techniques in their instruction practice.
- **Use** “language buddies” to pair an EL student with a classmate who is proficient in both English and the EL's first language.
- **Become** familiar with students' cultural heritage and norms. This will foster mutual trust and understanding.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What are effective strategies implemented in your school to support ELs?
- How does your school develop authentic performance tasks that connect to students' cultural backgrounds, interests and prior knowledge?
- Does your school understand differences in the communication and cognitive styles of various cultures and what these mean for student participation?
- How does your school involve families of English learners to support their education?

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

- Recognize that educating English learners is the responsibility of the entire school and staff.
- Adapt curriculum to utilize students' languages and cultures as a resource for further learning.
- Hold high expectations for all English learners.

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