

English Learner Recommendations – DRAFT

The number of students who do not speak English as their first language continues to rise in Oregon. Dual-language speakers offer a rich potential to the state, and yet the academic performance of this population continues to lag. The graduation rate for this population is only 49%. The state will not meet its 40-40-20 Goal without improvement in teaching students English.

The task force discussed at length the cause of this underperformance. Was it lack of funding? Was the funding misdirected? Were districts failing to use best practices? The task force made the following observations:

Observations:

- Students at early levels of English language acquisition may require more funding than more English-proficient students.
- Younger students may acquire new language skills at a faster rate than older learners.
- Students who change districts often will likely need a different level of resources than those who do not move often.
- Refugee students and those with interrupted formal education require more resources to educate than other ELL students.
- Students who become English-proficient prior to high school graduate in higher numbers than their native-English speaking peers.
- Districts with small populations of non-native English speakers may need different approaches or funding levels when compared to districts with large populations.
- Academic performance reporting for this population has been skewed, since it has under-counted successes because students were not counted as “ELL” once they had successfully exited the program. (The graduation rate for those who were ever in an ELL program is 58%).

Recommendations:

- Districts should be encouraged to use their additional .5 weight on ESL programs and ESL students. However, requiring districts to spend these dollars on ESL services is premature.
- Future studies of the School Funding Distribution Formula should include an in-depth analysis of the needs of this diverse population, the cost to meet those needs, and whether the .5 weight represents the necessary funding.
- Any changes in the ESL formula should be evaluated with respect to the change’s effect on other student populations.
- If a weighting change is proposed in the future, the subcommittee recommends that additional money be added to the State School Fund to avoid resource shifting and helping one group of students at the expense of another.
- Summer school offers a good opportunity for ESL students to gain skills and maintain their academic performance and should be part of any ESL discussion.
- Poverty is an intrinsic factor in this population; no ESL program will be entirely successful without addressing issues that arise due to poverty