

A Policy Briefing on Language Acquisition & Development

The primary purpose of Language Acquisition programs is to help students acquire proficiency in English. English Learners should receive instruction in other subjects and should be assessed in these other subjects in their primary language until they achieve proficiency.

Teacher Preparation: English Language Learners

California students have greater language diversity than in any other state or nation, and our State must meet the challenge of ensuring equal access for these students. Educators need to have in-depth understanding of language acquisition so that they can comprehend how strategies support students' language development during instruction of all academic areas. Educators need to understand how first language acquisition contributes to students second language acquisition. The basic need for teachers of English learners (ELs) is to obtain the skills and knowledge for effective teaching of ELs. Teachers who are not certified to teach EL students should be encouraged to obtain the appropriate English Learner authorization to enable them to work with students of all language backgrounds. Teachers who wish to teach students in their primary language should receive support to obtain the appropriate bilingual authorization. This authorization enables teachers to work with students of specific language backgrounds in the area selected for authorization.

English Plus

Laws and regulations that restrict the language (or languages) of instruction are contrary to the educational well-being of all students. English is the primary language of political, social and economic communication in the United States and students shall be provided access to programs which result in standard English proficiency and acquisition of core curricular knowledge, recognizing the benefits of the students' primary language or dialect.

Language Acquisition Programs Including Multilingual Programs

All students are entitled to equal access to all educational opportunities. Students without English proficiency are denied equal access unless appropriate educational support is provided. Regardless of title, programs to engender language acquisition have two goals - language skills development and content learning. Multilingual programs should focus on proficiency in the ability to speak, read, and write in English and the target language(s). Before students achieve proficiency, schools should provide meaningful instruction in all curricular areas in the primary language.

Instructional Materials: English Learners

English Learners (ELs) have specific learning needs. The acquisition of a second language takes a minimum of 3-7 years. Instructional materials for EL students should consider all levels of language proficiency, but special attention should be paid to Emerging, Expanding and Bridging levels. This proficiency should be determined by the students' scores on a formal and validated language assessment and the educational expertise of the classroom teacher. The core academic curriculum is taught to an EL in English with instruction properly scaffolded. Adopted instructional materials should be designed to meet the specific academic and linguistic needs of EL students. It is essential teachers of ELs have access to the highest quality instructional materials, as well as quality professional development. All instructional materials used for literacy development for ELs instructed in English should align to both the English Language Arts and the English Language Development standards of the State of California.

Assessment and Testing: Assessment for/of Student Learning

EL students should be given mandated tests in their primary languages until English fluency is attained. It is the responsibility of the State Department of Education to provide the state-mandated assessments in the child's primary language. Summative assessment practices and tools should include alternative ways to demonstrate mastery, especially students who are in multi-lingual programs and for students whose primary language is other than English.