



**Success Indicator IN10:** The school leaders roster ELs so that they spend the majority of their academic time in classes led by highly qualified, specially trained teachers (e.g. teachers with ESL Program Specialist coursework, QTEL training, bilingual instruction, or other English language training). (5887)

**Overview:** Due to the increasing demands on ESL instructors and push for inclusive instruction, ELs are spending more of each school day in mainstream classrooms. While some states are beginning to require specialists' certifications or designated coursework for all pre-service and current teachers working with ELs, over thirty states have no EL requirements for their teacher preparation or continuing education programs. Thus, many teachers are underprepared to provide the modifications and support needed for the academic success of these learners. For these reasons, school leaders need to not only recognize what designates a teacher as highly qualified to teach ELs, but also ensure that ELs spend the majority of their time in school with these teachers.

**Questions:** What does research say about the availability of highly qualified teachers for EL? How can current teachers become highly qualified teachers of ELs? How can school leaders increase the hiring of highly qualified and specially trained teachers? How do LEAs ensure that ELs are placed in classes with the most qualified teachers to teach them?

### **What does research say about the availability of highly qualified teachers for EL?**

Recent adaptations of inclusive education models and the increase in the numbers of ELs in schools has resulted in many students spending more time in mainstream classrooms taught by teachers with little to no training in how to meet their instructional needs. While the number of ELs entering classrooms is increasing exponentially, the pre-service and in-service training about supporting this population for teachers in math, history, and social sciences has historically lagged behind (Ballantyne, Sanderman, & Levy, 2008). Much of this can be attributed to the long-standing pull-out models of EL instruction or stand-alone ESL classes, which led to many teachers and administrators viewing EL instruction, including content area instruction, as the responsibility of the ESL specialist. The problem intensifies in smaller rural districts where limited finances are available to fund the training and materials necessary to properly prepare full-time specialists to serve this population (Hansen-Thomas, Grosso Richins, Kakkar, & Okeyo, 2016).

Since most teachers draw from their own experiential framework, those who were not English as a second language learners themselves, or spent time in classes alongside ELs, may not be aware of how they can modify their subject matter instruction to meet ELs needs (Reeves, 2006). Many districts have attempted to address this issue with professional development and efforts to hire bilingual faculty and staff. Notably, however, when professional development has been offered, the content of the trainings has historically focused on the beliefs that teachers have about EL students and their families (Elfers, Lucero, Stritikus, & Knapp, 2013). While this approach has importance as teachers' beliefs impact their classroom approaches, without attention to the skills and strategies needed to differentiate instruction appropriately for EL students, this approach to professional development inevitably has limited impact (Elfers et al., 2013). Research also suggests that teachers who have an immigrant background or learned English as



a second language may not recognize or deliberately incorporate these experiences as valuable assets in their teaching (Zacarian, 2011).

Thus, in order for schools to provide quality education for ELs, local education agents (LEAs) must ensure they have teachers, monolingual as well as bilingual, who not only understand the needs and resources of ELs, but are equipped with research-based practical strategies for planning, instruction, material modification, and assessment. This means not only hiring more teachers with specialist certification, but also focused training and educational opportunities for current teachers with ELs in their classrooms.

Language learning progress depends on the specific practices, academic or otherwise, that the language will be used for (Duff & Talmy, 2011; Larsen-Freeman, 2006). In a single academic setting such as a science classroom, language with a range of complexity and features might be used. For example, the language of a textbook may be challenging for an EL to produce themselves, but they may still be able to read and discuss the content of the text.

All students regardless of English proficiency will continue to learn new ways of communicating at school and throughout their lives (Gee, 2012; Janks, 2000; Martin, 2009; Rymes, 2014). This means, for example, that sometimes even beginning ELs and their English-knowledgeable peers might both learn specialized vocabulary for the first time together in a lesson that introduces it (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). In these cases, asking whether ELs have “caught up” to native speakers is less appropriate than asking how all students can be supported.

Discriminatory attitudes about language learners can also get in the way of assessing their progress when they are inadvertently held to higher standards than native speaking peers. Native English-speaking students can also struggle with academic language and content, and advanced ELs who struggle deserve similar support that does not only focus on language (Flores, Kleyn, & Menken, 2015).

### **How can current teachers become highly qualified teachers of ELs?**

At present, only six states require specific coursework for all teachers on topics like ESL methods and second-

language acquisition (NCES, 2015). More are considering adding to existing requirements or increasing requirements because teachers in other areas continue to report being underprepared to teach ELs when they exit their pre-service institutions (Short, 2013). In the meantime, it remains the LEAs responsibility to provide professional development that will assist certified teachers without specific EL methods training.

Reeves (2006) found that teachers’ main concerns about ELs in their classrooms relate to lack of time, heavier workloads, and their own inadequacy in teaching ELs. Providing training in EL instruction can address these issues and has been shown to increase ELs academic achievement (Reed & Railsback, 2003). Master, Loeb, Whitney, & Wyckoff (2016) suggest that professional development should help teachers stay current on EL education research, maintain connections with other practitioners, expand their instructional repertoire, and learn practices for the varying contexts and purposes they will encounter. In addition to professional development, LEAs can encourage and offer financial assistance to support teacher taking graduate and continuing education programs for in-service teachers, such as TESL certification, ESL Program Specialist Certification, TESOL master’s programs, QTEL, and SIOP. This type of training allows teachers to begin using techniques immediately in their classroom practices as their training continues (Short, 2013). Whichever path they choose, highly qualified teachers of ELs will gain identifiable skills such as the ability to adapt their instruction to support language development alongside content learning and to communicate effectively with students and their families. They will also gain a sense of self-confidence in their abilities to teach ELs (Gándara, P., Maxwell-Jolly, J., & Driscoll, A., 2005).

Additional information about QTEL and SIOP can be found at the following sites:

QTEL: <https://qtel.wested.org/>

SIPO: <https://www.siop.org/>

### **How can school leaders increase the hiring of highly qualified and specially trained teachers?**

In order to hire and maintain a highly qualified group of teachers, Darling-Hammond (2004) suggests a combination of mandates and incentives. According to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, all students shall be taught by “highly qualified teachers” who have state certifications. Since certifications vary



by state, some current certification standards may not include ESL training. Thus, LEAs need to establish their own benchmarks which require ESL certifications for newly hired teachers and require ESL training or professional development for current teachers. In addition, low performing schools may need assistance in developing a plan with accountability to increase their ESL certified teaching staff.

That being said, requiring higher qualifications without support or consideration of the contributing factors to the problem is destined for failure. Therefore, Darling-Hammond (2004) advocates for state-wide salary policies based on an “equalizing formula that provides different levels of funding to districts depending on their wealth, cost of education, and pupils needs” (p. 1959). More specifically, she suggests that salaries should be set at a minimum base then add additional compensation for specialized training (e.g. ESL certification and STEM specialties), schools with higher percentages of special needs students (including ELs), and schools with the greatest demand for qualified teachers. She also recommends forgivable loans or extended loan pay-back periods for new teachers taking positions in locations and in fields with teacher shortages.

Universities can contribute to the issue by partnering with schools in high-need communities for pre-service training and practicum work. By doing so, pre-service teachers will be provided mentoring from experienced professionals in schools with higher concentrations of minorities and low-income students (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Thus, when new teachers accept positions in high-need locations due to the offered incentives, they will be prepared and more likely to stay.

### **How do LEAs ensure that ELs are placed in classes with the most qualified teachers to teach them?**

While in the process of increasing the number of highly qualified teachers for ELs, school districts must continue to work within the limits of their current staff. Therefore, school districts may need to carefully place ESL certified instructors in schools with higher needs and roster ELs in the classes with the best instructors possible. Medium to large school districts should consider hiring a position specifically for this task. For example, the School District of Philadelphia has a Multilingual School Manager whose responsibility is to place ELs in ESOL-friendly classrooms and to oversee the curricula to ensure that they meet

standards (School District, 2017). This position could also coordinate sheltered instruction for new students and schedule ESL instructors for push-in and pull-out assistance. Kangas (2014) found that other instructional activities, special education in particular, were given a higher priority than ESL. Consequently, pull-out instruction teachers often arrived only to find that the ESL students were unavailable. A Multilingual School Manager could prevent this loss of time and assets.

When an ESL certified instructor is unavailable, Elfers et al. (2013) suggests finding support for the students by para-educators who are bilingual and/or have training with EL students. These para-educators can provide support for ELs in small groups or with one-on-one instruction while the content teachers continue to conduct class. Schools may be able to find such para-professionals by partnering with organizations that provide services to the immigrant population attending their school. Schools can also stay mindful of which teachers have EL training and prioritize placing ELs with those teachers. In addition, regardless of the mainstream teacher’s qualifications, ELs will receive higher quality education if mainstream instructors have the opportunity to plan and co-teach with ESL specialists.

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