EDITORS NOTE
Since shifting to remote learning, educators have considered the most efficient ways to support English-learners and bilingual students. In this Spotlight, discover how educators are remotely assessing English-learners, where existing gaps are, and how schools are encouraging bilingual students.

Bilingualism and Remote Learning

Bridging Distance for Learners With Special Needs ....................... 2
Schools Failed English-Learners During the Shutdown. How Can They Do Better? ........................................ 4
How to Assess English-Learners’ Needs From a Distance? Here’s Some Help ........................................... 4
English-Learners May Be Left Behind as Remote Learning Becomes ‘New Normal’ ......................... 5
‘English-Only’ Laws in Education on Verge of Extinction ...................... 7

OPINION
Helping ELLs Succeed in Distance Learning ........................................ 8
English-Language Learners Need More Support During Remote Learning ............................................. 9
As summer transitioned to fall, millions of students began the new school year the same way they ended the last: physically separated from the teachers and staff who are crucial to their academic success.

For English-language learners and students with physical or learning disabilities, the indefinite shift to distance learning poses even more challenges.

Under federal law, these students are eligible for special education services designed to help them succeed in school. But those services are not always easily transferable to distance learning, or even in-person learning with social distancing.

Some special education students have gone months without occupational, physical, and speech therapy services and other supports. In districts that provided virtual therapy, parents were pressed into duty, forced to try to replicate the therapy that trained specialists would normally provide in school.

Many English-learners don’t have dependable internet and technology at home, surveys show. Their teachers face a digital divide of their own: English-learner specialists undergo fewer hours of professional development with digital learning resources than traditional classroom teachers.

Schools must also acknowledge that some students will need both English-learner and special education support services.

After the rocky rollout in the spring, states such as California and Oregon urged schools to prioritize in-person learning for children with disabilities and those learning English when classes resume. If that return is weeks or months away, here are some steps, developed by English-learner and special education advocacy groups, and state departments of education, school districts can take now to connect with their students doing distance learning:

1. Listen to families

During the school shutdowns, parents were likely to become even more attuned to the needs of their children. As schools work to determine what students need, they should continue to gather feedback from parents.

Children whose parents are involved in supporting their learning do better in school. That support becomes even more important when the schooling is happening away from school.

Do not wait for families to ask for help. Reach out to them. Some families will simply not feel comfortable advocating for their children or pushing back against requirements that will not work for them.

For English-learner families, that often means finding a way to overcome language barriers. Roughly 75 percent of the nation’s roughly 5 million English-learners are native Spanish speakers. That means that more than a million are not.

Find out what those home languages are and connect families with staff or volunteers from community agencies who can help you communicate. That communication is key to student success and access. Some schools are relying on multilingual staff to connect with English-learner and immigrant families.

During the pandemic, Individualized Education Programs, or IEPs, the carefully constructed legal documents that determine what services students with disabilities are entitled to receive, became imprecise guides.

Some families reported severe learning loss and skill regression while schools were closed during spring and summer. Document the observations and concerns of parents and other caregivers. Let those observations guide revisions to their

---

**How to Support English-Language Learners In Distance Learning**

- **Synchronous Learning Time**
  - Use live instruction to provide necessary background knowledge, to model language and processes, and answer questions.
  - Make yourself available with virtual office hours for one-on-one consultations with students.

- **Reading and Writing**
  - Integrate activities that get students to discuss, argue, and analyze high-quality texts. Allow for students to provide feedback on each other’s work and to post collaboratively written narratives, informational/explanatory texts, and arguments.

- **Student Opportunities To Talk in Depth**
  - Ask students to record themselves for group presentations or to individually summarize a lesson using video or audio.
  - Teach students how to self-monitor, self-reflect, and self-record using video or audio.

- **Student Collaboration**
  - Design activities that allow students to engage with each other in pairs or small groups, and select platforms that allow students to comment, discuss, and edit each other’s work synchronously and asynchronously.

Icons: Getty

*SOURCE WestEd*
How do we support parents to ensure successful remote learning for emergent bilinguals?

A key component of success for emergent bilinguals, or English language learners, is parent/caregiver involvement. But as parents work to manage their children’s remote learning while balancing other responsibilities, they’re now faced with more challenges than ever before. So what can educators and administrators do to support them?

Get tips for supporting parents during remote learning.

IEPs—and your instruction plans, if possible.

With classes resuming, some special education administrators are fearful that a deluge of lawsuits from frustrated parents and disability rights advocates will overwhelm schools. That could well happen, but experts recommend focusing on what you can do for families, not what you cannot.

Parents will certainly expect more this fall. Make sure you can explain what your district has done to shore things up. Experts recommend being upfront and direct about what parts of an IEP or 504 plan cannot be met during distance learning. That could pave the way for an extension of what some educators called a “grace period”—the implicit understanding that, with their buildings shut down to slow the spread of coronavirus, schools were doing their best to serve students under trying circumstances.

2. Make online learning accessible

Logging onto school-issued devices and district learning platforms was a nightmare for some native English-speaking families in the spring. Imagine how difficult that is for families trying to access tech support in their second or third language.

A nationally representative survey from the polling firm Latino Decisions conducted on behalf of Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors, a parent-led educational organization, found that 82 percent of Spanish-speaking parents want more technical support with learning websites and apps and 83 percent needed more help navigating distance learning platforms. The Clark County, Nev., schools hosted virtual workshops for parents to help guide them through tutorials on how to use Canvas and Infinite Campus.

But families also may not even have internet access or adequate digital devices to begin with. Another Latino Decisions survey, this one conducted on behalf of Somos, a New York City-based health delivery network, in April, revealed that close to 40 percent of Latino families did not have access to broadband and one-third of Latino families did not have enough computers for their children to use at home during the nationwide school shutdown.

The concerns do not end there, though. A 2019 report from the U.S. Department of Education found that teachers of students learning English were more likely to use general digital education resources, rather than those specifically designed for English-learners.

To overcome those issues and support English-learners during distance learning, WestEd recommends that teachers prioritize live instruction and extra office hours to model language use. In the South Bay Union, Calif., schools, where roughly half of the 7,000 students are English-learners, the district will offer virtual breakout groups for personal instruction for smaller groups of students to encourage more discussion and engagement.

The federal Education Department also devoted pre-COVID 19 research funding to deepen understanding of how students with disabilities learn online.

A 2016 report from the Center on Online Learning and Students with Disabilities determined that most online learning platforms were “poorly aligned” with the needs of students with disabilities, offered little support beyond rote drills and practice exercises, and often failed to accommodate the needs of students who may struggle to focus or multi-task.

With the new school year underway in many schools, students with disabilities will need more and better instruction than they have received in the past—and the challenges and solutions will be different for each student.

In the spring, disability rights and educational advocacy groups launched EducatingAllLearners.org, a resource hub designed to provide insights and tips on improving remote learning for students with disabilities. The National Center for Learning Disabilities and Understood.org, which has published guides about the types of support that students with disabilities may need as school resumes. The organizations belong to the COVID-19 Education Coalition Centering Equity, which produced an equity guide for students with disabilities, English-learners, and other students whose needs may be overlooked or misunderstood as school resumes.

Understood.org has also written extensively about the supports that students with disabilities may need as the school year gets underway.

Part of the challenge lies in ensuring that students have access to appropriate accommodations and assistive technologies, such as text-to-speech software to help students with cognitive- or speech-related disabilities communicate with their teachers or devices that help magnify screen text for students who have impaired vision.

Students with IEPs or 504 plans may need accommodations such as web captions to follow live instruction or tools that allow them to access transcripts or recordings so they can listen and re-listen to teachers as they talk through assignments and lessons.

While many districts are trying to soften the blow of budget cuts on education for students with disabilities, finding money to pay for the accommodations and assistive technologies could prove challenging. In Georgia, the state department of education used $6 million in funds from the federal coronavirus relief package to help districts cover the costs.

3. Focus on co-teaching

The ever-evolving nature of education for students with disabilities and English-learners means that teachers need to collaborate to best serve their students because students do not learn in bubbles.

More than three-fourths of students with disabilities spent most of their day in traditional classrooms with peers who are not eligible for extra supports. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandates that children who receive special education services should, whenever possible, be taught alongside students who are not eligible for special education services.

Students in high schools—especially immigrant students—who are still learning English are often enrolled in separate programs. But programs that segregate English-learners in English-only classrooms have fallen out of favor and
practice nationally as research has indicated that other instructional models are more effective.

That means that general classroom teachers must communicate with special education and English-as-a-second-language specialists to review and determine what supports students need, and how and when they receive those extra supports. Without the collaboration and extra aid, the struggles that students and teachers slogged through in the spring could re-emerge this fall.

Schools must also acknowledge that some students will need both English-learner and special education support services. English-learner and special education specialists should also communicate with each other to distinguish between English-learners who struggle with the language and those who have learning disabilities.

When students are not in class full-time, it would behoove schools to think of parents as co-educators, too. Until students return to in-person instruction, they are your eyes and ears.

Children whose parents are involved in supporting their learning do better in schools. Research has borne that out time and again. But parental involvement has taken on a new meaning amid the pandemic.

When possible, provide parents with the tools they need to succeed—resources that can help them guide students through virtual therapy, modified math lessons or reading instruction for children with dyslexia.

Since schools resumed, schools face a high-stakes test of their ability to serve some of the nation’s most vulnerable students. And, without access to technology, the proper support services, and cooperation between educators and families, the students most in need of in-person schooling face an uncertain future.

The experience was tough even in places where schools found ways to connect with English-learners. Now, as schools begin to reopen, districts should redouble their efforts to make up for lost time, a new report from the Council of the Great City Schools suggests.

The report urges districts to pay close attention to how they choose and use technology and assess what skills students have learned and lost since schools shut down. It also emphasizes the importance of family engagement for parents and other relatives who are not fluent in English.

Professional development that emphasizes effective teaching strategies for all educators who work with English-learners; and rethinking how schools deploy English-learner specialists to ensure that students have ample opportunity for one-on-one or small-group learning support during online-only classes.

“The reality of what many [English-learner] and immigrant families have faced during the pandemic must be incorporated ... into any planning for the reopening of schools,” the report form the council, a membership organization of the country’s large urban school systems, reads. “The failure to address the needs of these students in the reopening of schools would jeopardize the educational outcomes of a sizable portion of students.”

Nationwide, English-learners comprise about 10 percent of students in the nation’s public schools. But they represent a larger portion of the population among the districts that belong to the Council of the Great City Schools, a membership organization of the country’s large, urban school systems.

But while some districts around the country are planning for English-learners to return to in-person classes first in order to make up for lost learning in the spring, the spread of coronavirus will cut off that option for others, at least at the beginning of the year. As the pandemic continues to rage in some parts of the country, many of the nation’s largest districts are starting the school year with remote learning as their lone back-to-school instructional model. The report also urges school districts to keep tabs on several groups of students, including those who had low attendance during classes in the spring and former English-learners who were reclassified as English-proficient in the weeks and months preceding school closures. The concern for both sets of students is that their English skills may have regressed since they last met face-to-face with instructors.

Published on August 18, 2020, in Education Week’s Learning the Language Blog

Schools Failed English-Learners During the Shutdown. How Can They Do Better?

By Corey Mitchell

The national shift to distance learning this spring left many of the nation’s nearly 5 million English-learner students shut out of the learning process—without internet, without language support, and without the devices they needed to participate in online education.

The experience was tough even in places where schools found ways to connect with English-learners. Now, as schools begin to reopen, districts should redouble their efforts to make up for lost time, a new report from the Council of the Great City Schools suggests.

The report urges districts to pay close attention to how they choose and use technology and assess what skills students have learned and lost since schools shut down. It also emphasizes the importance of family engagement for parents and other relatives who are not fluent in English;
How to Assess English-Learners’ Needs From a Distance? Here’s Some Help

By Corey Mitchell

Despite coronavirus-related closures, school districts are enrolling newly arrived students and children scheduled to start kindergarten in the fall—and federal law mandates that districts screen the students to determine if they need English-learner support services.

Districts are using home-language surveys to determine if students are eligible to take an English-language screening test. But with social distancing requirements that prevent face-to-face screenings, schools must find other ways to assess how much support new English-learners will need in remote learning environments or when classes resume.

To help out, the Council of the Great City Schools, a membership organization of the nation’s large, urban school systems, has developed a set of sample questionnaires to be used as provisional screeners for English proficiency during the COVID-19 outbreak.

A recently released fact sheet from the U.S. Department on Education on English-learner and distance learning advises that districts must attempt to identify English-learners to the “greatest extent possible” even though physical campuses are closed.

The biggest challenge for schools could come when classes resume for elementary schools, where a larger share of students are English-learners. Federal data show that roughly 16 percent of the nation’s kindergarten students are English-learners. Since most districts cancelled in-person kindergarten registration this year, schools may not have enough information to allocate adequate resources to support children who will arrive to school with little exposure to English at home.

The sample questionnaires from the Council of the Great City Schools help assess students’ English-speaking and listening skills as beginner-level, intermediate-level or advanced-level for students in three different grade bands—kindergarten through 2nd grade, 3rd through 5th grade, and 6th through 12th grade.

However, the organization cautions that provisional screenings cannot replace the formal English-learner identification process, which districts must administer once their schools resume normal operations.

Published on March 17, 2020, in Education Week’s Learning the Language Blog

English-Learners May Be Left Behind as Remote Learning Becomes ‘New Normal’

By Corey Mitchell

As the nation shifts to online learning during the novel coronavirus outbreak, language and access barriers may shut many of the nation’s nearly 5 million English-learner students out of the learning process.

A December 2019 report from the U.S. Department of Education found that few teachers reported assigning English-learners to use digital learning resources outside of class, in part because of concerns about students’ lack of access to technology at home.

The same report also revealed that teachers who work with English-language learners are more apt to use general digital resources rather than tools designed specifically for English-learners and that English-learner educators reported fewer hours of professional development with digital learning resources than did mainstream teachers.

Those findings suggest the spread of outbreak-related school closures could have severe consequences for the millions of students with limited access to digital devices or the internet, limited understanding of English, and limited ability to work independently without support.

“This crisis has emphasized the inequities and gaps that exist in our [education] system,” said Kristina Robertson, the English-learner program administrator for the Roseville, Minn., schools. “This is a wakeup call about the value of having technology for all.”

English-learner educators often offer tailored support for their students in class, something that is not available in many of the online programs schools have implemented, said Joseph Luft, the executive director of the Internationals Network for Public Schools.

The New York City-based network operates 28 high school and middle school campuses in New York city, the San Francisco Bay Area, the Washington, D.C.-area, and Minneapolis that educate more than 10,000 English-learners and
newly arrived immigrant students.

The widespread closures have left teachers and administrators scrambling for ways to connect with students they may not see face-to-face again for weeks or months. In New York City, schools are closed until at least April 20, and perhaps the rest of the year, Mayor Bill de Blasio said this week.

Education Week created an interactive map to track school closures across the nation: As of Wednesday, at least 39 states have closed schools to help slow the spread of coronavirus; the closures have affected more than 40 million public school students.

In some of the International Network’s New York schools, teachers spent the weekend printing paper packets for student pickup. The organization has also created a network-wide resource for teachers to share curriculum ideas and suggestions for connecting with families.

“This makes online learning a lot more difficult,” Luft said. “We’re trying to be very creative but it’s very hard to transition so quickly.”

Language Barriers

Across the country, public schools educate about 4.9 million English-learners from hundreds of different language backgrounds. While the numbers for several other languages are on the rise, 76 percent of the nation’s English-learners speak Spanish.

Many of the nation’s largest school districts have had significant English-learner populations for years, but communication challenges even exist for many of those school systems.

In Seattle, where schools will remain closed until April 24, the district offers translations for materials in six languages: Spanish, Somali, Mandarin Chinese, Vietnamese, Amharic, and Tagalog. That still leaves some families out of the loop. The district has nearly 7,000 English-learners and they speak a total of about 160 languages.

"[English-learners] who don’t speak one of the major languages have much less support,” Judie Haynes, an author and English-learner-educator consultant, wrote in an email to Education Week.

“All distance learning will probably be in English or Spanish unless another language group has a big concentration.”

The state of New Jersey, where Haynes is based, has a concentration of Portuguese students and teachers that would allow their needs to be met at school, she said.

Roughly 40 percent of the 7,000 students in Robertson's district, the Roseville schools, speak a language such as Spanish, Hmong, Karen, Somali, or Nepali at home.

The district employs 11 cultural liaisons, whose duties range from providing interpretation and translations, advising students, cultural navigation, and working to bridge the language and cultural gaps that emerge between district staff and families.

The district also plans to establish a multilingual Facebook page to communicate with families and send daily robocalls and emails in multiple languages to inform families about meals and other efforts to support families.

“Families need to have somebody they trust to communicate what they need from schools, Robertson said. “They want their children to be safe and have learning opportunities just like everyone else.”

Banding Together

Colorín Colorado, a site for English-learner educators, has compiled a list of resources and suggestions for school staff and English-learner families. The guide includes tips for ensuring that families have access to information about online learning and that their district or school online-learning plans account for English-learners.

In addition to providing links to COVID-19 information in several languages, the site also offers tips on staying connected with English-learner families during the extended shutdowns by communicating with families via phone calls, texts or video chats and providing translated information whenever possible.

“We want to ensure immigrant and English-learner families aren’t left behind,” said Giselle Lundy-Ponce, an English-learner advocate with the American Federation of Teachers. “It’s going to require a monumental effort.”

In an ongoing online survey of teachers conducted by the site, respondents have reported that many of their English-learners don’t have laptops or tablets to access online lessons; in some cases, they don’t have internet access.

“We would like not to lose anything [in terms of learning progress], but that’s not very realistic,” Robertson said. “Some families are going to be left behind.”

A longtime English-as-a-second-language teacher, Haynes started #ellchat about a decade ago. On Monday, the Twitter chat focused on online learning for English-learners during the coronavirus outbreak. The exchange focused on tools that could help students access online lessons and remain in touch with teachers.

TESOL International Association, an organization for teachers who specialize in working with English-learners, has also collected resources that teachers and administrators can use to help guide their discussions with students about this pandemic.

‘Losing Ground’

Luft is especially concerned about a particular subset of English-learners: older students who are nearing graduation.

School districts have long struggled to meet the educational needs of these students, including refugee and immigrant students who often have gaps in their formal education. Laws allow students to enroll in traditional public schools until they reach age 21, but many times they’re
Bilingualism and Remote Learning

Luft fears that, with extended school closures, some of these students may leave school without graduating, unless some districts waive exam requirements or amend state laws on how many days schools must be in session.

“It’s just throwing another roadblock in their way,” Luft said. “We don’t know how long this is going to last. They’re in real danger of losing ground.”

Robertson has asked district staff, including the cultural liaisons, to monitor whether families have enough food and understand when to seek medical help during the coronavirus outbreak.

Staff in the district—which has a one-to-one computing initiative—were also pressing to get tablets to students as schools shut down.

“You can digitize instruction, but education is about connections,” Luft said. “We don’t really know what this is going to look like over the next couple of weeks. I’m not looking for miracles; I’m just looking for people working to keep kids connected to school.”

Lawmakers in Arizona already dealt a blow to the bilingual education ban last year, cutting the amount of time English-learners have to spend in mandatory English-only immersion classes from four hours a day to two.

“We should be using evidence-based best practices and giving flexibility to school communities, so our [English-learner] students can more quickly pick up their new language and succeed in the long-term,” Hoffman said in a statement provided to Education Week.

Bilingual activists and the state tangled for decades over the legality of the requirement that ELLs take four hours of English instruction a day—a move that opponents said restricted ELLs’ access to other coursework and minimized their exposure to native English-speaking peers. In 2015, the San Francisco-based 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the state in Flores v. Arizona, rejecting the plaintiffs’ argument that the state’s approach to teaching English-learners violated the federal Equal Educational Opportunities Act, a law that requires states and districts to provide students with appropriate aid to overcome language barriers.

Research-backed bilingual education models often take a different approach, such as mixing native English speakers with English-learners in dual-language classrooms in which students learn English and a second language.

‘Unz Initiatives’

Software developer Ronald Unz, who financed the campaigns to ban bilingual education in Arizona and California, isn’t convinced...
that a return to bilingual education will benefit English-learners.

Approved in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the laws known as “Unz initiatives” replaced bilingual education with structured- or sheltered-English-immersion programs.

In the early 2000s, Unz and other proponents of California’s English-only law felt vindicated when ELLs’ test scores in English proficiency and reading rose in the first few years after the law passed.

“All the research is done by bilingual activists and bilingual academics and bilingual professors,” Unz said.

“They all predicted getting rid of bilingual education would be a gigantic disaster.”

But evidence began to emerge more than a decade ago that the English-only approach was not producing the intended results.

A U.S. Department of Education-funded study released in 2008 found that states with bilingual education had smaller achievement gaps on the National Assessment of Educational Progress than states with the “Unz initiatives.”

Fifteen years after the law passed, Arizona has one of the nation’s lowest graduation rates for English-learners; roughly 40 percent of English-learners in the class of 2017 earned a high school diploma in four years. That’s 25 percentage points below the national average.

“With the passage of time and the outcomes we were getting, we could see, anybody could see, that it wasn’t working,” said Delia Pompa, a senior fellow for education policy at the Migration Policy Institute’s National Center on Immigration Policy.

Pompa was the head of the U.S. Department of Education’s bilingual education office and then the National Association of Bilingual Education during the years that voters passed the “Unz initiatives.”

“The accountability movement in K-12 education ushered in by the No Child Left Behind Act led to the undoing of the English-only laws because districts had to closely monitor the progress of all students, including English-learners, she said.

“There was a mistaken notion that if you just expected these kids to speak English and work harder at it, they would do it. It was clear that these kids weren’t doing well,” Pompa said. “I don’t think it’s an accident that you kind of saw a domino effect with these [laws].”

**Turning Tide**

Despite the mounting evidence, the tide against the English-only education laws did not begin to turn until 2016.

That’s when California voters passed Proposition 58, which effectively repealed that state’s Unz initiative: Parents there no longer have to sign waivers if they want their children to participate in bilingual education or dual-language immersion.

A year later, Massachusetts lawmakers passed the LOOK Act, an acronym for “language opportunity for our kids.”

As in California, Massachusetts districts can now select their own method for teaching English to English-learners.

The push to repeal Proposition 227 in California, also led to the creation of the seal of biliteracy, which grants special recognition to high school graduates who demonstrate fluency in two or more languages. Less than a decade after California introduced the honor, students in nearly 40 states and the District of Columbia can earn recognition for their ability to read, speak, and write in more than one language.

“We are much more enlightened and realize what bilingual students bring to the classroom,” said Santiago Wood, executive director of the National Association of Bilingual Education.

The law has restricted teachers of English-learners, as well as students.

Patricia Sandoval-Taylor, the director of the language acquisition department in the Tucson, Ariz., district, taught in a structured English-immersion classroom after the state’s English-only law passed.

When helping her students define a vocabulary word such as elegant, Sandoval-Taylor said she was prohibited from using the Spanish equivalent, elegante, to help her students make the connection.

“Even though I knew their primary language and could help them with that tool, I instead had to use English only,” Sandoval-Taylor said.

In Tucson, English-learners must prove their proficiency in English before they’re allowed to enroll in dual-language programs. But native English-speaking students don’t have to prove their proficiency in another language in order to enroll in dual-language.

Lisa Graham Keeegan, who served as Arizona’s state schools superintendent when the English-only law passed and neither supported nor opposed it at the time, said some of the state’s highest performing schools, especially those with significant English-learner populations, simply ignored the law.

“[The nonsense that occurs when we deny children the opportunity to use and develop their native language can be both demoralizing and counterproductive],” Keeegan said.

“Our best examples of teaching English well do so with great respect to, and use of, the native language.”

**OPINION**

**Helping ELLs Succeed in Distance Learning**

By Larry Ferlazzo

I’m concerned about English-language learners misunderstanding directions and not having a good way to help them. They may not turn in work because they don’t know what to do.

This happens often in school but can be fixed by walking by and checking in. What can I do?

**Innovating and Connecting is Communicating ...**

Sarah Said currently leads a multilingual learning program in an EL education school in a suburb 50 miles west of Chicago:

Yes, we worry about our language-learners struggling with directions via distance learnings. It’s difficult when we can’t walk over to a desk and redirect a student’s interpretation of our assignment. What do we do? It’s like taking a puzzle piece and flipping it around multiple times until you figure out the right fit. Yes, that’s what we need to do, we need to think and innovate until we can connect with our students. That’s how we can communicate.

In these times, understanding the teacher’s instructions is not going to be easy for many students, not just your language-learners. This article will give you some tips and tricks that will help you better innovate and connect for communicat- ing with students about the directions of your assignments from a distance.

**Catch Their Attention**

Whether you are using technology to deliver instruction or you are having to send paper materials, you still need to find a way to connect with students by catching their attention—just like you would need to in the classroom. A handout with a bitmoji of you doing a silly dance can go a long way. ... But
How do we support parents to ensure successful remote learning for emergent bilinguals?

Across the country, everyone is adjusting to remote learning. While each district’s learning model may look different, from fully in-person to fully remote, every school is most likely incorporating some form of remote learning for those students who need it. As a result, educators and administrators are having to reevaluate the ways in which they’re engaging emergent bilingual students, or English language learners, and assess what’s needed to ensure their success.

A GROWING POPULATION
Emergent bilinguals are one of the fastest-growing segments among school-age children in the US, projected to account for 25 percent of the total K–12 enrollment by 2025, according to the National Education Association. Despite these growing numbers, however, as a group, emergent bilinguals statistically underperform their non-emergent bilingual counterparts.

The pandemic may exacerbate this achievement gap, as experts at the Migration Policy Institute estimate that students will lose 30 percent of their annual reading gains and up to 50 percent of their math gains due to what they’re referring to as the “COVID slide.”

ENGAGEMENT IS KEY
Engaging emergent bilinguals in remote learning is paramount. A key component of emergent bilingual success is parent/caregiver involvement, as research from the National Education Association connects increased parent engagement to better student attitudes, improved academic performance, and a reduction in dropout rates.

But parents are now faced with more challenges than ever before, as they work to maintain jobs and other responsibilities while also managing their children’s remote learning. Fortunately, there are things educators and administrators can do to support parents and caregivers for better student outcomes.
OPENING THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION

Two-way communication is even more important during remote learning, and each emergent bilingual’s family may have their own preferred way to communicate. Colorín Colorado, an organization that provides resources for educators and families of English language learners, suggests finding out what works best for each family with a quick informal survey. Translation apps, like Talking Points, are also helpful, as are additional resources, like translation services and/or a translation hotline offered by schools or districts.

Teaching remotely makes it more challenging for educators to get to know their students—and to do so as quickly—so parents should be encouraged to share details about their student’s personality, interests, and strengths.

ENCOURAGING THE USE OF HERITAGE LANGUAGE

Educators should encourage parents to harness and use their heritage language with students while at home. Research has shown that educational programs that incorporate the use of emergent bilinguals’ heritage language result in levels of academic success—in literacy and other academic subjects—that are as high as or better than those of emergent bilinguals in English-only programs.\(^1\) Research has also found that emergent bilingual students are able to transfer many skills from their first language to facilitate their acquisition of reading skills in the second language.\(^1\)

During remote learning, parents should be encouraged to:

- Speak in their heritage language using complete sentences and correct grammar (e.g., usted vs. tu in Spanish)
- Watch educational programs in their heritage language
- Read with their learners
- Use this as an opportunity to learn English themselves, to set an example for their children
SETTING UP STUDENTS AND PARENTS WITH THE RIGHT TOOLS

Used both in the classroom and at home, educational technology has been shown to be beneficial for language learning, especially the use of speech recognition to provide practice and pronunciation feedback in a safe, nonjudgmental space. One such program is Rosetta Stone English®, a new solution that uses speech recognition technology and immediate, corrective feedback to help students build linguistic confidence in academic English.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY SOLUTION

As administrators evaluate the educational technology solutions their district or schools are using to support remote learning, they should also consider tools specifically designed for emergent bilinguals. The following questions can be used to assess how well a program supports emergent bilingual students.

- Does it support educational equity?
- Is it culturally responsive for better student engagement?
- Does it blend English language learning with academic content areas, like science, math, history, etc.?
- Does it offer continuing progress monitoring or assessment?
- Does it combine online and offline instruction?
- Can it be individualized or personalized for each student?
- Does it offer corrective feedback?
- Does it provide ongoing, actionable data and reports?
- Is it easy to implement and use?


ABOUT ROSETTA STONE EDUCATION

Rosetta Stone is a global leader in technology-driven language and learning solutions for individuals, classrooms, and entire organizations. Our scalable, interactive solutions have been used by over 12,000 businesses, 9,000 public-sector organizations, and 22,000 education institutions worldwide, and by millions of learners in over 150 countries. For more information, visit www.rosettastone.com.
Bilingualism and Remote Learning

really, when the presentation of the material is attractive, not too busy with a thousand fonts and graphics, and interesting, a student is more likely to attempt to read it. It’s kind of like being in the classroom and having to find a way to relate to them in person. Now, you have to do it from a distance. So, whether it’s a Google slide or handout, make it look like something that they would want to read at their age level. It’s a way of connecting with them. If they want to look at it, they will want to read it.

Make Sure You Are Communicating the End Goal to Your Assignments

As you would in a classroom, you still need to have targets and objectives of what you want students to achieve within your assignments. Find a way, either in pictures or video, to break down these targets for them. If students understand the purpose of the work you are giving them, it will give them a clearer vision of the expectations of them. This still needs to be conveyed from a distance.

Watch Your Language Usage

Whether you are writing a document or creating videos of your instruction, use language that you know your students will understand. If you have to use an academic word that your students may not know within directions, you need to still utilize comprehensible input by explaining what these terms mean within their social language. If in a video, you can use Total Physical Response (TPR) in order to convey meaning. On paper, use visuals or simple examples to explain the contents of the directions. If students are literate in their native language, do what you can to support native-language directions in their home language. Technology may not be perfect, but it’s better than not having anything.

Model... Model... Model

Whether it is done by paper example, on seesaw through a series of photos, through a Zoom screen share, or a video recording, you still need to model how to complete the assignment. Modeling is critical when you are teaching from a distance, more than it is in person. A Zoom chat is ideal for practicing and applying content with students. Using screen-share features and allowing them to complete content with you is ideal. However, if you don’t have this resource at hand, you can text photos of examples through the Talking Points app or make a phone call.

Be There Emotionally ...

Through Zoom casts of support I have given multilingual students over these days and family story night Zoom casts I do every Thursday, I have seen inside more people’s houses than within my 17-year career. I’ve gotten to know my students and their families more this way. Through those connections, I have been able to academically and emotionally support students and families. When students know that you will be “there” to answer questions and guide them through the work they are completing at home, they are more likely to try to reach you to ask questions. Knowing that you are “there” to help gives them the confidence to ask for help. Empathy will go a long way with supporting students academically.

Larry Ferlazzo is an award-winning English and Social Studies teacher at Luther Burbank High School in Sacramento, Calif., Larry Ferlazzo is the author of Helping Students Motivate Themselves: Practical Answers To Classroom Challenges, The ESL/ELL Teacher’s Survival Guide, and Building Parent Engagement In Schools.

OPINION
Published on June 19, 2020, in Education Week

English-Language Learners Need More Support During Remote Learning

These four evidence-based suggestions can help educators offset learning loss for young English learners.

By Leslie M. Babinski, Steven J. Amendum, Steven E. Knotek, and Marta Sánchez

Young children who are learning English require special consideration during virtual instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Approximately 1 in 6 children in kindergarten and 1st grade in the United States are learning English as a second (or third) language. As teachers grapple with the monumental task of providing remote instruction to English-language learners, it’s important that state
and district leaders provide extensive support and clear guidelines for engaging their ELLs.

Virtual learning for elementary school students, particularly those in the early grades, has been provided in a wide range of formats, including live online sessions with teachers, videos, internet links, and printed packets. The responsibility of connecting young children to these resources often falls to parents. In many ELL communities, internet access may be limited to a cell phone, making it difficult for parents and children to navigate learning activities, especially if multiple children are in the home.

This spring, 48 states suspended school for the remainder of the school year, resulting in millions of students who will miss over 20 weeks of in-person learning. Given what we know about learning loss during the traditional summer months, it is critical to support families and teachers to ensure that children are able to engage in learning activities during this unprecedented time.

Under federal Title VI requirements, school districts are required to ensure that English-language learners can meaningfully participate in instruction. Although the types of in-person instructional services vary both across and within states, ELLs typically spend most of their school day in the general classroom with English-only peers and receive specialized instruction from English-as-a-second-language (ESL) teachers for a specified number of hours a week. In the current climate, it is critical that ELLs continue to make academic progress and receive social-emotional support from their teachers along with their English-only peers.

As state and district leaders consider outreach through email, phone calls, and physical copies of instructional resources for providing equitable access to possible remote instruction when schools reopen, we offer the following evidence-informed suggestions for consideration.

1. Support students’ emotional and mental health by maintaining relationships with schools and teachers.

During the abrupt end to in-person schooling because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to virtual instruction, it was important for school leaders to pay special attention to their districts’ outreach efforts to families who do not speak English as their first language. Many families with English-language learners may also face significant challenges during this time from loss of work, separation from extended families, and concerns about their health. Information to help parents support their children allows for continuity of the central place of the school in the lives of many families. Additional resources from schools and districts for interpretation and translation with clear two-way communication may be necessary to support both teachers and families during remote instruction for ELLs.

2. Encourage and support families to use their best language.

As parents have moved into a home schooling role, it is important to provide a clear message to families that by using their home language, they can continue to support their children’s progress in literacy. In fact, recent research shows that young ELLs with strong early-literacy skills in their native Spanish at kindergarten entry made greater growth in English reading from kindergarten through 4th grade. In this study, the effect of early Spanish reading ability was more influential than students’ ability to understand and speak English. Given the results of this study, the message for virtual learning is clear: Support and encourage families to use their best language. Skills learned from reading in native languages support learning in that language and can also transfer to learning to read in English.

3. Build on the considerable strengths of bilingual families.

Families of English-language learners have considerable strengths that can be leveraged by schools and teachers to help them through this difficult time. By building on families’ cultural wealth when planning virtual learning activities, ESL and classroom teachers can collaborate to tap into their students’ cultural and family backgrounds through instructional activities that originate from a strengths-based viewpoint and can engage and sustain connections with families. Such a model can be used to recognize and build on family strengths and cultural knowledge. For example, teachers can offer learning activities that include the entire family, such as taking turns in storytelling or having older siblings read to younger ones. In the Latino community, for instance, parents may engage their children by using “cuentos” (stories) or giving “consejos” (advice in the form of a proverb).

4. Provide opportunities for enhanced teacher collaboration.

Imagine kindergarten and 1st grade students and their parents trying to navigate virtual instruction from multiple teachers with different content, web portals, and instructional strategies. From our research in elementary schools, there are clear benefits for students when ESL and classroom teachers collaborate to provide aligned instruction with coordinated scaffolding for their ELLs. For example, after briefly planning together, ESL teachers can provide direct instruction to preteach specific academic vocabulary to support ELLs’ comprehension during literacy lessons provided by their classroom teachers. Or ESL and classroom teachers can align instruction by using the same instructional strategies to teach phonics or reading-comprehension strategies across settings. Meaningful access to remote instruction for ELLs requires intentional collaboration between classroom and ESL teachers. As this type of collaboration is all the more difficult as the teachers themselves work remotely, it will require support for teachers from education agencies at the school, district, state, and national levels.

Focusing on supporting English-language learners and their families during virtual instruction will help teachers provide access to the curriculum and keep lines of communication open. While this is critical as families, teachers, schools, and communities adjust to life during various phases of stay-at-home orders in many states, these principles can also support families in the transition back to in-person schooling.

Leslie Bahinski is an associate research professor in the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University and the director of the Center for Child and Family Policy. Steven Amundsen is an associate professor of literacy education in the School of Education at the University of Delaware. Steven Knotek is an associate professor in learning sciences and psychological studies and the coordinator of the School Psychology Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Marta Sánchez is an assistant professor in the College of Education at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington and a faculty affiliate at Duke University.