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Bilingualism & Remote Learning

|Second Edition|

EDITOR'S NOTE

Since shifting to remote learning, educators have considered the most efficient ways to support English-learners and bilingual students. In this Second Edition Spotlight, evaluate how schools will measure learning loss for English-learners; gain key insights on the struggles serving disabled bilingual students; discover tips educators are using to teach math, reading, and writing; and hear directly from a first-generation American on what's working.

Bridging Distance for Learners With Special Needs **2**

How Will Schools Measure English-Learners' 'COVID-Slide' Learning Loss? **4**

Schools Struggled to Serve Students With Disabilities, English-Learners During Shutdowns **5**

Evaluating English-Learners for Special Education Is a Challenge. Here's Help **6**

How to Teach Math to Students With Disabilities, English-Language Learners **7**

OPINION

Author Interview: 'Reading & Writing With English Learners' **9**

I'm a First-Generation American. Here's What Helped Me Make It to College **10**

Published on September 16, 2020

Bridging Distance for Learners With Special Needs

By Corey Mitchell

As summer transitions 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.

District and school leaders are confronting difficult, high-stakes decisions as they plan for how to reopen schools amid a global pandemic. Through eight installments, Education Week journalists explore the big challenges education leaders must address, including running a socially distanced school, rethinking how to get students to and from school, and making up for learning losses. We present a broad spectrum of options endorsed by public health officials, explain strategies that some districts will adopt, and provide estimated costs.

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 of 2020, 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,



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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 Ed-

ucation 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. Document the observations and concerns of parents and other caregivers. Let those observations guide revisions to their 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 moving forward. 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 of



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?

Find out in the Rosetta Stone white paper, [Supporting Parents for Successful Emergent Bilingual Remote Learning](#).

Get tips for supporting parents during remote learning.



DOWNLOAD WHITE PAPER

2020, 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.

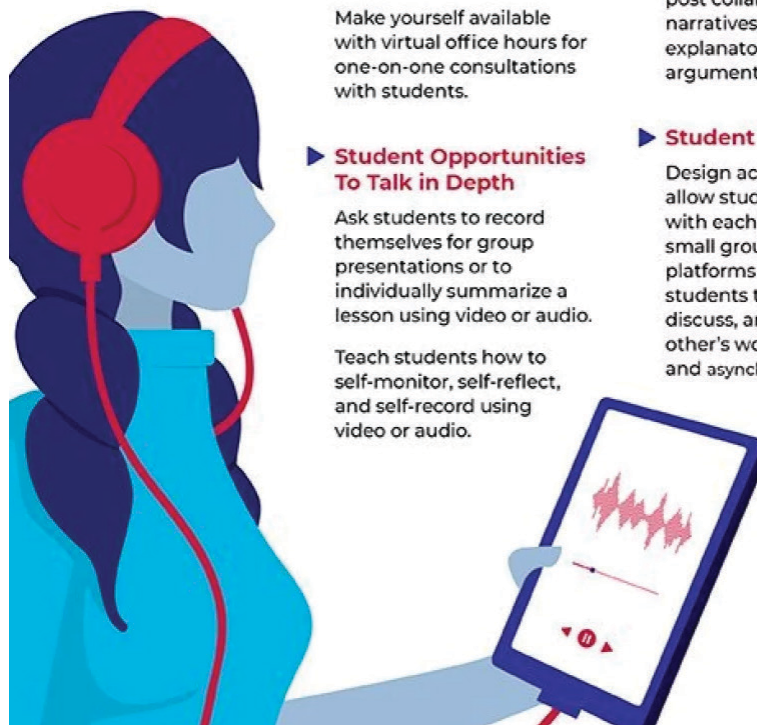
With the new school year underway in many schools, students with disabilities will need more and better instruction than they have received in the past—and the challenges and solutions will be different for each student.

Disability rights and educational advocacy groups launched [EducatingAllLearners.org](https://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.

Downloadable Guide: [Key Back-to-School Questions for ELLs and Students With Disabilities](#)

Understood.org has also written extensively about the supports that students with disabili-

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

ties 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 tech-

nologies 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 ex-

tra aid, the struggles that students and teachers slogged through could re-emerge.

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.

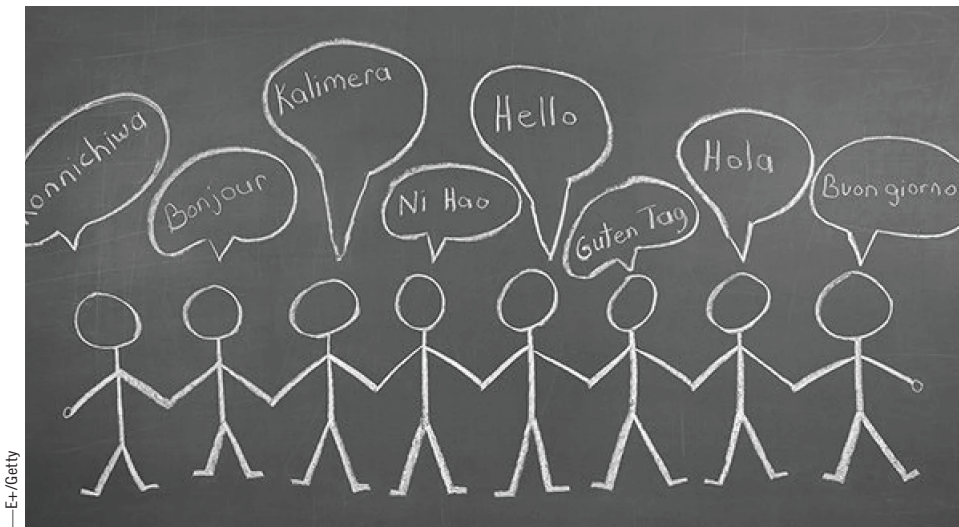
When students are not in class full-time, it would behoove schools to think of parents as co-educators, too. Until students return to in-person instruction, they are your eyes and ears.

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.

When school resumes, schools will 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. ■



Published June 17, 2020

How Will Schools Measure English-Learners' 'COVID-Slide' Learning Loss?

By Corey Mitchell

Educators are worried about students losing ground while school buildings are closed to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus.

The so-called coronavirus- or "COVID slide" may be especially troublesome for English-language learners, the 5 million students still learning English in the nation's K-12 schools. Many of them could fall farther behind

because of a confluence of factors, including limited access to the internet and the language support services they often receive in school.

Along with their native English-speaking peers, English-learners likely will face a battery of tests when school resumes to gauge what they've learned and lost during the extended school closures—but those assessments may not fully reflect what they know and can do in academic subjects, especially if they cannot demonstrate their knowledge in English.

A new policy brief from the Migration Policy Institute explores the policy and practical questions for states considering implementing native-language assessments, tests that may be better suited to gauge what students know and what subjects they need support in apart from their English-language instruction.

"With high-stakes accountability likely to remain a fixture of the U.S. education system and increasing recognition of the value of multilingualism for students' future and the U.S. economy, it is more important than ever to ensure that education policymakers have the means to capture a full and accurate picture of EL academic achievement," the brief's authors, Julie Sugarman and Leslie Villegas, wrote.

The authors argue that native-language assessments are tools to measure students' grasp of concepts, not just their English proficiency. However, not all schools and states offer assessments in languages other than English.

Under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, states must "make every effort" to develop statewide assessments in students' first languages if they constitute a significant portion of the student population. But the law stops short of requiring the assessments.

According to the Migration Policy brief, 31 states plus the District of Columbia offer native language assessments, most commonly in math or science but sometimes in reading-language arts and social studies, too.

Since some states and districts have no native-language assessments of their own, many use the Northwest Evaluation Association, the maker of the widely used MAP assessments, which are also available in Spanish, to gauge the academic growth of their English-learners. Nearly three-fourth of the nation's En-

English-learners are native Spanish speakers.

English-learner students are “not in the environment they’re used to where they’re getting input to be able to practice, to be able to interact,” said Teresa Krastel, who guides content development for the Spanish MAP Growth and Spanish MAP Reading Fluency assessments for NWEA.

“That, in combination with the limitations we’ve seen all over the place, the limitations in equity, access to tools, teachers in an online

environment not directly targeting skills that English-language learners need to practice,” are cause for concern, Krastel said.

Schools typically use the NWEA assessments three times per year, in the fall, winter, and spring. Roughly 160,000 students took the NWEA Spanish assessments in fall 2019; that number dropped down to 5,000 students for the spring 2020 testing period, said Adam Withycombe, manager of assessment products for NWEA.

“We anticipate that that kind of COVID slide is going to be pretty dramatic,” Withycombe said. “I’m pretty sure it’s going to be even more so for English-learners.”

It remains unclear if the coronavirus-related school closures will spur demand for native-language assessments, but they are needed for a “fair and accurate accountability system,” said Sugarman, a senior education policy analyst at the Migration Policy Center’s National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy. ■

Published November 19, 2020

Schools Struggled to Serve Students With Disabilities, English-Learners During Shutdowns

By Corey Mitchell

Accessing education during the nation’s COVID-19-related school closures was often an uphill battle for the combined 12 million students who are English-language learners and students with disabilities and their families.

A new report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office outlined the factors that complicated the delivery of special education services and shut off access to learning for English-learners. Under federal law, these students are eligible for tailored, specialized education services designed to help them succeed in school. But those services are not always easily transferable to distance learning.

For the study, the Government Accountability Office reviewed distance learning plans for 15 school districts, selected for their proportion of either English-learners or students with disabilities to measure how well schools adapted to serve students who were physically separated from the teachers and staff who are crucial to their academic success.

The shift to distance learning “laid bare both the logistical and instructional challenges of distance learning” for both sets of students, the report found.

The study found that educators struggled to meet the wide range of needs of students with disabilities served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which covers students who struggle academically, need emotional and behavioral supports, or are medically fragile and require full-time aides



to access learning.

To adapt to the schooling limitations created by the pandemic, some schools adjusted students’ learning goals and service plans with mixed results, the study found.

For students with disabilities, schools were often unable to deliver services, such as speech, occupational, and physical therapy, that were guaranteed in students’ Individualized Education Programs.

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.

Schools did report increased parent and teacher collaboration, but the study authors concluded that “providing students with the services they need remains an ongoing challenge.”

English-learners, especially those from homes where English is not the primary language, lost access to teachers and classmates

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This is a pivotal and perilous moment in our fight for equity in education. The impact on students will be felt long after the pandemic is over.”

DEMOCRATIC REP. BOBBY SCOTT
THE CHAIRMAN OF THE U.S. HOUSE
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

who helped foster understanding of the language.

Many English-learners also lacked access to dependable internet and technology at home, the report found. Their teachers faced a digital divide of their own: English-learner specialists undergo fewer hours of professional development with digital learning resources than traditional classroom teachers.

The study found that schools used strategies to build connections with families and adapted and translated learning materials in Spanish and other languages to compensate for the loss of in-person instruction. Despite the efforts, schools still struggled to address the needs of families who speak less commonly spoken home languages.

Faced with these challenges, several states urged schools to prioritize in-person learning for children with disabilities and those learning English when classes resume. But those plans are threatened as another surge in coronavirus cases has forced a growing number of school systems back into districtwide remote plans.

“This is a pivotal and perilous moment in our fight for equity in education,” Democratic Rep. Bobby Scott, the chairman of the U.S. House education committee, said in a statement. “The impact on students will be felt long after the pandemic is over.”

The study was conducted as part of the Government Accountability Office’s COVID-19 monitoring and oversight responsibilities under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security, or CARES Act, which provided billions of dollars in funding dedicated to K-12 schools. ■



—Sandy Huffaker/Education Week

Published June 18, 2019

Evaluating English-Learners for Special Education Is a Challenge. Here’s Help

By Corey Mitchell

Schools often have trouble identifying English-language learners with learning disabilities—and most states don’t offer formal guidance to help educators diagnose and support the students.

A report from the National Center on Educational Outcomes found that just nine states have publicly available manuals designed to help educators. That’s despite a 2016 recommendation from the U.S. Department of Education that states should produce clear policies and guidance to help schools distinguish between English-learners who struggle with the language and those who have learning disabilities.

Drawing that distinction is key because English-learners with disabilities who are not actually identified may not be able to access important services. English-learners who are misidentified as having learning disabilities may have less exposure to content that develops their language and higher-order thinking skills. Research has shown that English-learners with disabilities achieve higher academic performance and linguistic development when exposed to both languages.

The report author, WestEd senior research associate Elizabeth Burr, interviewed several of the manual writers, culling tips on how to develop and promote the manuals, train teachers and avoid roadblocks that can slow down the implementation process.

In their interviews, the manual writers shared stories of educators confused, and sometimes clueless, about the educational rights of both English-learners and students with disabilities. In Michigan, officials found educators in several districts who said they were not aware that schools must identify and evaluate children that they suspect may have a disability. In Minnesota, special education consultant Elizabeth Watkins came across educators who mistakenly assumed there was a mandatory three-year waiting period before English-learners could be referred to special education services.

That confusion among educators could be problematic for English-learners’ families, especially those who may not know that their children can qualify for special education services or even understand how schools define learning disabilities.

“The concept of [a] learning disability does not exist in many cultures,” Watkins told Burr.

“I think that’s a helpful perspective for licensed staff—English-speaking staff—to think about.”

Another government research lab, the Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast & Islands, produced a guide that could help bridge that gap of understanding. The two-page document offers a series of recommendations on how to determine whether a student’s struggles stem from their limited English-lan-

guage proficiency or a learning disability. The suggestions include:

Establishing relationships with parents, bilingual education and special education teachers, speech pathologists, trained interpreters and others to help identify a student’s needs.

Using data from sources such as attendance records, classroom observations—and standardized test and school assessment re-

sults that focus on knowledge and skills, not just English proficiency.

Consider students’ skills in English and their native languages and create classrooms that value their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Federal data indicates that about 15 percent of English-learners are identified as having learning disabilities. ■

Published on May 5, 2020

How to Teach Math to Students With Disabilities, English-Language Learners

By Corey Mitchell

Math education can be difficult—for students and teachers.

Those difficulties are often magnified when students have learning disabilities such as dyscalculia that can make it difficult to learn math facts or dyslexia that can make it hard to read word problems. Or maybe they are learning English and struggling to grasp math concepts in a new language.

In interviews with Education Week, experts—practitioners and researchers—offered perspectives on how to make mathematics instruction best serve those student populations. Their advice clustered around three themes:

- Resist the temptation to de-emphasize language in math class, especially for English-learners and those who have language-related disabilities. De-emphasis is probably a disservice.
- Consider how broad student labels can conceal mathematical skill. English-learners, depending on their prior schooling, and students with disabilities, depending on their specific disability, can have widely varying math abilities and knowledge.
- Focus on what students can do rather than fixating on what they cannot.

Emilia Frias, who has taught English-learners and students with disabilities in special education and general education classrooms, has



—Getty

long understood the struggles her students face.

A former English-language learner who was also identified with learning disabilities as a child, the Magnolia, Calif., school system special education teacher did not learn to read until 6th grade—and her difficulty with reading often carried over to math class, where word problems left her frustrated and puzzled.

Now that she’s on the other side of the equation, Frias uses carefully constructed lessons to meet the disparate needs of her 3rd and 4th grade students with moderate to severe learning disabilities. She is always looking for the individual strengths that will carry them further, and she doesn’t shy away from making words central to her lessons.

During a live-video session, Frias used trays filled with home-baked cookies to deliver lessons on multiplication for some, addition

and subtraction for others, and counting for those who are still working on one-to-one correspondence—the early math skill of counting each object in a set.

Language Counts

“I had questions for each of those levels: ‘How many were in tray 1?’ ‘How many were in tray 2?’ ‘How many were altogether?’” Frias explained. “Then I had questions like, ‘Which one had more; which one had less?’ And these are questions that I’m typing out for parents to be asking their kids.”

Just like their peers, her students need to know how to use math in life, and that includes mastering math words and phrases, Frias said.

“I want to give them all the vocabulary and terminology, and I would do the same thing

with my English-learners,” Frias added. “If we don’t, they’re missing out on a lot of opportunity that their peers have exposure to.”

Cathery Yeh, an assistant professor of teacher education at Chapman University in Orange, Calif., works alongside Frias and other teachers in the Magnolia schools, helping them develop lesson plans and strategies for teaching math to English-learners and students with disabilities.

To reach all their students, math instructors at all levels of K-12 education must shed the belief they only teach math, Yeh said.

“Math teachers—we often see ourselves as content-area teachers. Like our job is to be knowledgeable about math and not necessarily responsible for promoting language development,” Yeh said. “But we have to support learning math through language and learning language through math.”

Labels Can Limit

Part of the challenge in supporting learning lies in being cautious about the overly broad labels attached to students who receive special education or English-learner services. The labels often fail to focus on the strengths or particular needs of students, experts say.

“These kids show up, they have labels” given to them by schools, said Judit Moschkovich, a professor in mathematics education at the University of California, Santa Cruz. “Then we make all kinds of assumptions.”

U.S.-born English-learners could excel or struggle with math. Immigrant students sometimes come to U.S. schools with more math knowledge than their U.S. peers. Some refugee students have missed years of formal schooling.

But however much educators need to pay attention to such differences, they should drop the misconception that English-learner students need to be proficient in the language to learn math, Moschkovich said.

“It takes a long time to learn a second language, and we can’t wait,” she said. “Even as they’re learning English, they are able to learn mathematics and even communicate mathematically.”

Unwarranted assumptions are also made about students with disabilities. Brad Witzel, an education professor and special education program coordinator at Winthrop University in South Carolina, said educators who teach math should define expectations for students based on their skills, not their labels.

“We don’t fully understand the cognitive power of children with disabilities,” Witzel said. “We’re so stuck on deficit skills we end up

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Society has to change our notions around who can and cannot do math. The goal isn’t for our children to memorize procedures, but to develop ways of knowing and thinking mathematically that can help support them in problem solving and reasoning for life.”

CATHERY YEH

focusing on what they can’t remember rather than what the concept to be learned is.”

A problem that can compound such deficit thinking is that assessments and individualized education programs for students with disabilities often fail to provide a clear picture of whether students have difficulty with reading comprehension or number sense—or both, Witzel said.

A student identified with a learning disability in math could be a struggling reader or a fluent one. If the difficulty is with both math and reading, text-heavy math books make the problem worse, and explicit vocabulary in math class becomes even more critical, Witzel said.

“I worry about how we can tease [math and reading disabilities] apart,” he said. “We need to be much more precise.”

Focusing on Strengths

Melissa Brennan, the 2020 teacher of the year in Orange County, Calif., strives not to

oversimplify lessons, she said, because her students—many of whom have autism spectrum disorder—deserve and can handle more.

Now that schools are shut, she’s delivering distance-learning lessons on counting, place value, and estimation that parents can replicate with items they can find lying around the house.

With the help of Yeh, Brennan, who teaches in the Magnolia schools, began to shift her thinking about a decade ago from what her students could not do to how math could help sharpen the focus on what strengths they have.

“Society has to change our notions around who can and cannot do math,” Yeh explained. “The goal isn’t for our children to memorize procedures, but to develop ways of knowing and thinking mathematically that can help support them in problem solving and reasoning for life.”

While visiting Brennan’s class when school was still in session, Yeh watched her teach a lesson to her students, who have mild to moderate learning disabilities, on evenly dividing a group of items like pretzels or toys. Educators call this a “fair share” lesson, and it introduced her nonverbal students to the mathematical concepts of division and fractions.

The everyday activity of sharing familiar objects put those concepts within reach for students with IEPs that mandate their math instruction focus on counting, Yeh said. Students can often do more, but to make that happen, educators must be sure the learning connects to their daily lives.

With her strengths perspective, Brennan has even discovered a bright side to the school closures that have forced her and her students into distance learning. As she works with parents at home, she finds many begin to really understand what their children are capable of.

“They could be good at pattern recognition or really understand the principles of the lesson even if they haven’t memorized math facts yet,” the teacher said.

Frias, Brennan’s colleague, learned long ago what she was capable of, and sometimes that understanding is her most valuable lesson to students. In her first special education teaching job, Frias taught in a juvenile-justice facility, where many of her students had learning disabilities. When she explained to them that she also has visual- and auditory-processing disorders, many of them dismissed her claims.

Frias had her mother dig through boxes with her school papers to find a copy of an old IEP. She brought it to class as proof and to deliver a message to her students with disabilities.

“Yes, it is harder for us,” Frias said, “but it doesn’t mean we can’t do it.” ■



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.² 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?

Get additional remote learning tips in the Rosetta Stone white paper *Supporting Parents for Successful Emergent Bilingual Remote Learning*. Learn more about Rosetta Stone language solutions at rosettastone.com/k12.

1. **Genesee, F. (2010).** The home language: an English language learner's most valuable resource. *Colorín Colorado*. Retrieved 8/17/20 from <https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/home-language-english-language-learners-most-valuable-resource>.
2. **Golonka, E.M., Bowles, A.R., Franka, V.M., Richardson, D.L., & Freynika, S. (2014).** Technologies for foreign language learning: a review of technology types and their effectiveness. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*. 27(1):70-105.

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.

OPINION

Published on December 29, 2020

Author Interview: ‘Reading & Writing With English Learners’

By Larry Ferlazzo

Valentina Gonzalez and Melinda Miller agreed to answer a few questions about their book *Reading & Writing with English Learners: A Framework for K-5*.

LF: What made you decide to write this book, and what did you learn from writing it?

Valentina Gonzalez & Melinda Miller:

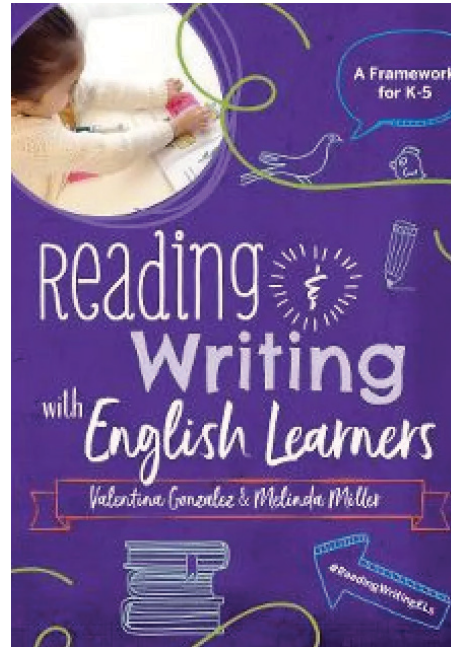
Our love of literacy is rooted in our personal experiences as students, and we both have lengthy histories in education, specifically with language arts. Though our lenses were different, we both saw the need for a book that served both mainstream classroom teachers and ESL teachers. Our goal with this book is to provide educators with the essential knowledge they need to help English-learners thrive in reading and writing classrooms.

LF: If you had to pick your three favorite instructional strategies from all the ones you’ve written about, which would they be and why?

Valentina Gonzalez & Melinda Miller:

We share so many instructional strategies to help ELs become confident and strong readers and writers that it’s difficult to narrow down to just three favorites! But we’ll give it a go.

We love using QSSSA (question, signal, stem, share, assess) with English-learners, because this is a strategy that gets everyone talking (Page 114). It is very important for every child to have many opportunities to use their language throughout the day, and QSSSA ensures total participation. Students in small groups number off, then the teacher asks a question for students to think about. When they have their answers in their head, they give a certain signal, such as a thumbs-up, to indicate they’re ready. The teacher then gives students a sentence stem for answering the question, and students take turns using the stem to share their responses with their groups. Groups may create a group response



based on the answers given. Finally, the teacher assesses understanding by having one student share out from each group (all twos, for example). Group members support the student who is chosen to share out to the whole group. QSSSA supports English-learners as they work with peers in a group, listen to each other’s responses, and give their own responses.

We also love Elkonin boxes (Page 119). In this strategy, the teacher has a student say a word slowly, listening to all the sounds. Next, the teacher makes a box on a piece of paper for each sound in the word. As the teacher and student say the word together slowly, the teacher demonstrates how to push a plastic disc into each box as they hear each sound. The student takes over the pushing as the teacher asks, “What did you hear?” “How do you write that?” and “Where will you put it?” The student then writes each letter in the boxes, then reads the entire word as it is completed. Elkonin boxes are exciting for students, as they allow them to hear and record sounds to make words they can read.

A third favorite is the sentence-pattern-ing chart, which we like to pair with the picture-word inductive model (Pages 124-125). The teacher presents a visual that is interest-

ing and relevant to students (a picture of a dog, for example). Students and teacher think of words related to the concept and label the picture. Next, the teacher makes a chart with two or three columns, titled, for instance “have,” “are,” and “can.” Together, teacher and students brainstorm words for each column, using the labels on the picture as a word bank. Everyone reads the words in each column chorally, and the teacher models how to build sentences using the chart. An example sentence might be “Dogs have four legs.” Finally, students work in pairs to practice creating sentences.

LF: You explain in the book that it applies a balanced literacy approach and that it uses a workshop model for reading and for writing. Of course, this perspective is attacked by some in the so-called “Reading Wars” as not being particularly effective or rigorous. What would your response be to those who might take that perspective?

Valentina Gonzalez & Melinda Miller:

Those who know us know we don’t like war—of any kind. We are not in this business for conflict or battle. We are here to support the readers and writers in front of us, no matter who they are and how they enter our room. As Penny Kittle says, “Follow the child.” We know the research, we understand the passion, and it’s no secret that we are passionate, too—about our work and service, literacy, and English-learners.

There are many different interpretations of balanced literacy and the workshop model. Rather than attacking one another and our instructional practices, we believe it’s best to come together and ask questions and to try to understand one another. We believe that, as educators, we are all invested in students’ growth and progress. Despite different approaches to literacy, we believe we have more in common with one another than not.

Our suggested approach to balanced literacy provides direct instruction (which may include phonics), plus time to practice reading and writing using all of the strategies learned through direct instruction. The work-

shop-based balanced literacy approach is rigorous. Students read and write at their own level, and teachers support all students through differentiated instruction. Using the balanced literacy approach, teachers can try many different instructional strategies until they find what works for each individual child, and that, after all, is what we are all here for!

LF: Mini-lessons are a key part of your teaching approach. Can you explain what those are, why you think they are important, and share some examples?

Valentina Gonzalez & Melinda Miller:

We all know how valuable our class time is. Every minute is important. So it's also important that we analyze how we spend that time. Whole-group instruction implies that all learners will learn the same information at the same pace. That's just not practical for all learners. We know that the learners in front of us are not all starting from the same place, and they don't all have the same needs.

However, direct instruction is important because it provides a way to give explicit instruction to a group, large or small. The best part of mini-lessons is that they don't take up too much valuable class time, yet they allow us to deliver necessary instruction to learners.

The mini-lesson is one example of the direct instruction we are talking about. Teachers address one specific skill that specific children need to practice through a mini-lesson. It is a short, concise lesson that focuses on that specific skill and provides modeling, student practice, and connections to students' worlds. Teachers can determine what to teach through mini-lessons by examining student writing and observing students as they read and write. Typically, mini-lessons incorporate authentic literature to provide context for the skill. Mini-lessons can be taught to the whole class or small groups.

An example of a skill covered in a mini-lesson for primary grades is using capital letters at the beginning of a sentence. The teacher can activate students' prior knowledge by reading a familiar book to them. It is a good idea to use a big book so all students can see the text. The teacher can show students many examples of how sentences start with capital letters and then write sentences on sentence strips to model

using capital letters at the beginning of sentences. Next, students can work in pairs to write their own sentences on sentence strips, using capitals at the beginning. Finally, the teacher can ask students to go to their book bags and look through books with a partner to identify capitals at the beginning of different sentences.

LF: You use Gradual Release of Responsibility as one of the frameworks for your book. What do you think makes that strategy particularly effective with ELLs?

Valentina Gonzalez & Melinda Miller:

English-learners benefit from teacher support, but it is important to gradually reduce support and let students take on more of their reading and writing independently. Pearson and Gallagher (1983) suggested Gradual Release of Responsibility through "I Do, We Do, You Do." First, the teacher models the skill (for instance, read-aloud and write-aloud) and invites students to talk about what they are seeing and hearing. Next, the teacher leads students in shared reading, guided reading, or shared writing, during which students read and write themselves with support from the teacher. Finally, students practice applying all they have learned by reading and writing independently. Even though this is an independent time, teachers are still there to offer support as needed.

LF: Is there anything I haven't asked you that you would like to share?

Valentina Gonzalez & Melinda Miller:

We think our book will benefit all reading and writing teachers as they work with both English-learners and native-English speakers. Teachers can use the book as a resource by reading it cover to cover or by homing in on specific strategies they want to try on a certain day.

Whether or not you subscribe to the balanced literacy approach and reading and writing workshops, you will be able to find many strategies throughout the text that will be useful in supporting your English-learners. We believe there is something for everyone in this book! ■

Larry Ferlazzo is an English and social studies teacher at Luther Burbank High School in Sacramento, California.

OPINION

Published on January 11, 2021

I'm a First-Generation American. Here's What Helped Me Make It to College

By Roni Lezama

Three ways to help immigrant and first-generation students succeed

My father is an immigrant from Mexico who decided to sacrifice his home to give me a better life. He grew up with the notion that the United States had one of the best education systems in the world and he saw that education as my ticket to participate in the pursuit of happiness.

When he moved to America, he chose Flushing, Queens, in New York City—which this year became an epicenter of the COVID-19 crisis—because the public elementary school was highly regarded for its academics and safety. But navigating the public school system was extremely difficult, marked with constant reminders that the system was not designed for students like me. These difficulties and inequities have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis and will continue to impact students if they remain unaddressed.

My father always lived with the fear that if people found out I was the son of a Mexican immigrant, I would be ostracized in the classroom. From the first day of elementary school, he prayed that no one would bother me for being Mexican American, and that I would learn English quickly so I could defend against attacks on my identity. I have gone through all my academic career fighting the stereotypes that Mexicans are all "lazy" and "undocumented."

I have experienced an interesting duality as a Mexican American, one that has played a formative role in my education and development. I have two languages, two countries, two identities. I learn in English but live in Spanish. I am Mexican at home but American at school.

I first became aware of this code-switching in middle school. The ways I interacted with

my white, wealthy peers were far different from with my Latinx friends. I understood that English held more power than Spanish. Many people associate an accent or different regional variants of English to be unsophisticated, so I worked to be perceived as “articulate” and “well-spoken” at my local elementary and middle schools. In fact, it was my attention to coming across as “articulate” that helped me get into the high school that I attended.

I wanted to attend a high-achieving high school, but I did not perform well on the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT) and therefore failed to be admitted into one of New York City’s specialized high schools. But the principal of Millennium High School, a selective public high school in Manhattan, offered me a spot—and gave me a shot. Principal Colin McEvoy saw more than the student who failed to get into a SHSAT school. He saw a well-spoken kid who was determined to find a school that would have the resources to achieve his goal of graduating and going to college. My father had sacrificed everything so I could go to college, and I saw Millennium as the means to get there.

Not every student can have the same opportunity I did, but every school community and educator can take certain steps to support students who feel at odds within a system that was not designed for them. Here are three steps that will help students like me:

1. Play an active role in their students’ lives outside of academics. While this is important during “normal” times, it is even more important now during the global pandemic when students are worried about their family, cut off from friends, and unsure what the future holds. Each student should be assigned a teacher who also serves as adviser, an additional adult figure in their life to help guide and assist them—even if this is done virtually. At Millennium, each student in the beginning of the high school experience is assigned an adviser and meets in advisory class three days a week to complete college-preparatory activities and check in with their adviser about academics and their personal life.

2. Acknowledge how political developments may affect students. Schools should provide students who may be affected by a policy decision with the tools to protect their education. I have many friends who have been affected by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy and had to go through the complex process of ensuring they could study in the country without their



parents. In June of 2020, the Supreme Court rejected the Trump administration’s efforts to rescind DACA, but immigrants’ fight for protection under the law is far from over. It is important for teachers to understand how politics can impact the well-being of students—and how the fear of those impacts often take a toll on students’ academics.

3. Offer guidance on how to apply to college and options aside from college. My former high school requires every student to meet with the college guidance counselor at least twice, once each in their junior and senior years. As the first in my family to apply to college, these meetings were essential for me to figure out the application process, as well as for navigating financial aid and scholarships. It was only with this guidance that I applied for a Posse Foundation scholarship and earned a full scholarship to Middlebury College—opportunities that I would not have even known about otherwise.

As the COVID-19 vaccine gets rolled out more widely, there remain a lot of unknowns in higher education and in many families’ financial futures. Educators can help students explore alternate opportunities during this difficult time, including community college, internships, apprenticeships, gap years, or service-learning options.

Students of marginalized communities are both fighters and academics. Going through the American education system is difficult, and there are active ways that schools and educators can help their students navigate it. This is not a

matter of doing the work for the students but acknowledging that there are several challenges present in students’ lives—challenges that may be exacerbated during a pandemic—and helping them navigate them. ■

Roni Lezama is a junior at Middlebury College studying International Politics and Economics. He previously interned at the Asia Society, where Heather Singmaster helped edit this essay.

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