

ENGLISH LEARNERS

English Language Development: Minutes, Models, and Outcomes

Partner Beaverton School District

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How do multilingual students learn language and grade level content?

Beaverton School District (located just outside Portland) has Oregon's third largest population of multilingual students, including English learners, who bring valuable cultural, linguistic, and individual strengths, assets, and diversity to the classroom. The federal government requires all schools to provide English learner students with access to rigorous grade-level content and quality English language instruction. However there are different models to do so. The Beaverton multilingual department wanted to be sure they were offering students evidence-based language and content learning.

Comparing instructional models

There were, in fact, at least four different language teaching models in Beaverton. These included “pull-out,” which involves moving English learner students out of their usual classroom for special language instruction; co-teaching, in which a language development teacher joins the classroom (or the classroom teacher is endorsed in both content and language instruction); English language development class period in middle and high schools, where English is taught as content, and dual language—a model in which all students in the class learn together in both English and a partner language. Other variations included combinations of the models. But which model was most effective and for how many minutes of the day? The district partnered with Education Northwest to find out.

Researchers identified two steps to answering this question. First, they had to confirm which of the programs students were actually enrolled in. Then, they compared student performance in two ways to determine which model was most effective. One measure was growth on the standardized English proficiency tests that students in the district take each year. The other was the amount of time it took students to be reclassified—in other words, how long does it take for a given child no longer to be considered an English learner student, and how does this vary by English Language Development program?

Expanding what works in English language acquisition

The Beaverton data confirmed that students in co-teaching and dual language models showed the fastest growth in their English language proficiency. Students in pull-out and those whose parents waived English language development support showed the slowest growth. Researchers also found diminishing returns after about fifty minutes of English language instruction a day.

With this knowledge in hand, Beaverton School District's multilingual department is considering an expansion of its dual language program, increasing both the number of schools using the model and the languages included. Education Northwest will continue our partnership with the district to support this work.