

ENGLISH LEARNERS

Developing Oregon's Multilingual Learner Strategic Plan

Partner Oregon Department of Education

Team Manuel Vazquez Cano, Jennifer Johnson,
Lymarís Santana, Karen Pérez-Da Silva



Multilingual learners bring valuable cultural and linguistic assets to the classroom. However, systemic inequities in multilingual learners' access to high quality educational content and supports contribute to suboptimal outcomes in K–12 education. Oregon House Bill 3499 directed the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) to develop the Oregon Multilingual Learner Strategic Plan to guide the state in addressing these disparities.

Collaborating early and often

Education Northwest's first step was to work closely with ODE to take stock of what they had already done. We then collaborated on developing a shared vision for the new plan. Multilingual learners includes students classified as English learners as well as students in dual language programs and those who are not classified as English learners but do speak a language other than English at home. We started planning extensive outreach to the community right away to ensure the final plan would incorporate the perspectives and knowledge of educators and parents from diverse communities.

Including educator and community voices

The strategic plan needed to present the state's goals for multilingual education and give both the state and individual districts specific action steps. We met frequently with ODE as well as a workgroup comprised primarily of the English Learner Advisory Group, which advises the state on English learner education and includes educators, parents, and university faculty members.

Together, ODE and Education Northwest undertook an iterative and collaborative process that included over 60 focus groups attended by more than 400 individual participants. We also conducted a statewide survey open to all educators and administrators in the state. This included not just English language development teachers but those focused on college and career as well as academic standards. The survey covered the plan’s early mission, vision, and focus, as well as things that are currently working well in Oregon’s multilingual education and areas that need improvement.

Implementing the plan to support multilingual learners

The new Oregon Multilingual Learner Strategic Plan centers students classified as English learners—both because they generally need the most support and to follow the spirit of state law. By supporting English learner students, ODE also expects to help other multilingual learners, such as students participating in dual language programs. The plan’s four priority areas are:

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| <p>1. Authentic and responsive community engagement and partnerships</p> <hr/> | <p>2. Systems, instruction, and assessment improvements</p> <hr/> |
| <p>3. Transformative educators and administrators</p> | <p>4. Pathways to multilingualism</p> |

The plan outlines goals for each priority area and action steps to achieve them. Because the plan doesn’t include new funding for implementation, the partners were careful to involve various state offices in its development to align it with existing funding sources and initiatives such as Oregon’s other student success plans.

One aspect of implementation is a statewide professional learning community for educators, which will initially focus on supporting newcomer students. Another aspect is the continued involvement of the English Learner Advisory Group, on which Education Northwest’s Manuel Vazquez Cano will serve. For Education Northwest, the project was an opportunity to involve staff members with a variety of areas of expertise, ranging from research to practice. Pre-existing relationships with ODE staff members and community-based organizations were also critical. With the plan complete, Oregon is now ready to continue implementation in 2025 and beyond. The plan’s priority areas, goals, and action steps will guide both the state and its school districts in supporting multilingual learners for years to come.