ENGLISH LEARNERS

Preparing Educators to Teach Multilingual Learners

Partner Oregon State University, Boise State University, Western Washington University, Western Oregon University, University of Washington, University of California Santa Clara, Santa Clara University, and Portland State University

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Around the country, an increasing number of students are multilingual learners, speaking and learning multiple languages at the same time. Some of these students are classified as English learners, which means that they are eligible for English language development supports. In some schools and districts in the Pacific Northwest and other regions, up to 70 percent of children are classified as English learners. However, teachers prepared to serve these students are almost always in short supply. It's not just a matter of teaching language itself—teachers need training to be able to teach content areas such as mathematics or history to English learner students, too.

To address the need to improve instruction for multilingual learners, the federal Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) provides National Professional Development grants to teacher preparation programs. These teacher preparation programs are typically, but not always, universities. Through a five-year partnership, teacher preparation programs prepare in-service or preservice teachers to qualify for endorsements in either English for Speakers of Other Languages or dual language instruction.

Partnering for evaluation of teacher preparation institutes

We are currently partnering with eight teacher preparation programs as part of the OELA grant program. In addition, two of our partners who were originally funded in 2016—Oregon State University and Boise State University—completed their grants last year. We are currently partnering with Oregon State University (refunded in 2021), Western Washington University, Western Oregon University, University of Washington, University of Oregon, University of California Santa Cruz, Santa Clara University, and Portland State University.

Education Northwest partnered with these teacher preparation programs to apply for this grant and serve as the program evaluator. As program evaluators, our purpose is to support our partners by collecting data from participants, districts, students, and others, creating actionable recommendations for program improvement. Another very important evaluation goal is to determine how effective the endorsements are in improving student-level outcomes, such as English language proficiency.

Growing confidence, rising scores

While the pandemic inhibited our ability to collect test scores (state assessments were not administered during this period), we did see growth in English language arts scores. For example, at Oregon State we saw that the programs positively impacted students' English language arts assessment outcomes, which were almost 14 percentile points higher than those of comparison students. In the case of Boise State, it should be noted, there were not enough students involved for the increase to be statistically significant. We also saw a large growth in teacher confidence and knowledge, as well as a small but noticeable change in their (self-reported) use of instructional methods for supporting multilingual learners.

The Oregon State and Boise State University programs were the first to be evaluated. In coming years, we'll be supporting three grants in the state of Oregon and intend to combine outcomes data. This larger sample will enhance our ability to determine whether the programs are impacting multilingual learners' progress. As results from more university partners' institutes become available, OELA will be able to make informed decisions about the future of the grant program, and we will continue to build the research base on the effectiveness of endorsement programs for supporting multilingual learners.