Research to Practice Brief

Welcome to the first University of Minnesota College Readiness and Achievement Gaps *Research to Practice Brief*. The *Research to Practice Brief* will provide school leaders with information and resources on current Minnesota issues related to closing achievement gaps and preparing students for postsecondary success. Each brief will provide short guidance on a topic and include resources available at the University of Minnesota and beyond. School leaders can use the *Research to Practice Brief* as a framework for applying current research to best meet their school's needs.

Issue One: English Learners

- 2014 EL Legislation
- Principles from Research
- Applying Research to Schools
- Resources

2014 English Learner Legislation

A key theme in the legislation is the educational benefit of developing and supporting students' home or native language. Literacy and academic skills learned in any language enhance cognitive processes that support second language learning, and in fact all academic learning. The new legislation recognizes that students' first languages are an asset and a resource for their academic learning, and encourages school administrators to build on these skills to promote students' bilingualism and biliteracy.

The new law requires "preparation in English language development and specially designed content instruction in English for English learners" for all teacher licenses after August 1, 2015. (Rules are yet to be developed). The law does not mandate one model or instructional paradigm.
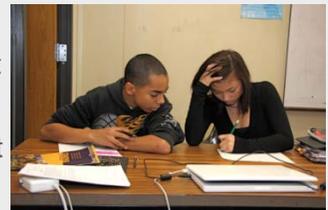
How Should School Leaders Apply the Research?

1. Provide professional development on teaching language and content at the same time to all teachers in the school. Sustained support over time, not just one workshop, is necessary to assure quality implementation. Several resources are listed below.
2. The professional development should include understanding the academic language demands of content areas and strategies for supporting all students' development of academic language skills, as well as how to make use of students' home languages.
3. Provide EL and regular classroom teachers time to collaborate and align their content and instructional methods, especially when co-teaching.
4. Place ELs in regular classrooms as appropriate, allowing for targeted ESL as needed (students with limited or interrupted formal education may need additional focused instruction).
5. Provide bilingual students opportunities to use their native language while learning. For example, they may work in small groups in their native language, or bilingually.
6. Assure that libraries and classrooms have books and other resources in multiple languages that are easily accessible and encouraged by teachers.
7. Communicate with parents in home languages as well as English. Encourage parents to speak, read, and write in their home language with students. A student who is actively learning two languages will develop faster than one who is being discouraged from using his or her native language.
8. Display signs throughout the school in multiple languages, and convey a welcoming attitude towards non-English speakers, such as using basic words and greetings in students' home languages.

Effective language instruction requires flexible, in-person interaction. Online or highly structured interventions can be tempting, but investing in highly skilled ESL professionals is best for your students.

Some Minnesota schools have implemented long-term bilingual programs, such as two-way immersion or developmental bilingual education, that provide for subject matter learning and literacy development in the child's native language and English. This is an excellent option and schools interested in creating bilingual programs may consult the U of M's Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) for more information.

What Does Supporting Students Home Language Look Like in the Classroom?

A visit to a classroom with ELs might find students working in small groups. ELs are clustered together and allowed to use English or their native language, or both, as they work. (On another day, the same learners may work in different heterogeneous groups, mixing ELs and   native

speakers so that ELs have opportunities to interact with them as well.) The teacher has structured the lesson so that students take notes in the language they choose, and then discuss a series of questions about the topic. The teacher is comfortable with the students' use of another languag because the task presented to the students is clear, and the teacher can assess through observation or questions and answers in English whether the students are making progress. The final product, a paper or a presentation, will usually be in English to support language development and allow the teacher to evaluate it.

Professional Development Resources

CARLA: The University of Minnesota's Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition provides summer professional development for language teachers and resources on content-based instruction for learning languages, including immersion and bilingual programs.

English Language Learner University: This site provides free, short (2-3 hour) online courses funded by U.S. Department of Education aimed at teaching adults, but many concepts are transferable.

Center for Applied Linguistics: Extensive resources for educators, including professional development resources (for a fee) such as *What's Different About Teaching Reading to Students Learning English?*

Resources for the Classroom

What Works Clearinghouse: This is the federal Department of Education's tool for finding programs supported by high quality research.

Stanford University, Understanding Language: Contains open-source teaching resources that support language development and learning in English language arts, math, and science.

Academic Language and Literacy: Information, tools, and resources for educators to deepen student learning of academic language in all classrooms.

Translanguaging: A guide for educators on combining content and literacy instruction in culturally relevant teaching.

Resources for and about Parents

¡Colorín Colorado!: Resources for educators, including guides for reaching out to EL families, and resources for families. In Spanish and English.

How to Raise a Bilingual Child: This is a guide for parents, in both English and Spanish, from the University of California- San Diego.

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