



RESEARCH for **ACTION**

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Alphabet soup: A glossary of terms about English language learners

Terms about language acquisition

ELL: “English language learner,” a student who is in the process of learning English and requires extra language support in order to succeed in a mainstream classroom.

LEP: “Limited English proficiency,” the term used in federal documents to refer to English language learners. Some advocates for language minority students reject this term because of its focus on limitations rather than possibilities.

ESL: “English as a Second Language,” one of many terms that refer to the study of English within English-speaking countries by students whose native languages are not English. In most ESL models, English is taught as a subject, with a focus on reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Mainstream classes: Courses in which proficiency in English is assumed.

Push-in ESL: Instructional model in which a teacher or aide provides language support within the mainstream content classroom.

Pull-out ESL: Instructional model in which a teacher takes students out of mainstream content classes to provide targeted, small-group English lessons.

Sheltered instruction: Instructional model designed to teach ELLs English language skills and required academic content within the same course. Subject matter is taught using strategies to make content comprehensible to learners of English.

ESOL: “English for Speakers of Other Languages,” term used to encompass ESL and English language instruction in non-English-speaking countries. Sometimes preferred in English-speaking contexts to account for students who are learning English as a third or fourth language.

Bilingual programs: Educational programs in which two languages are used for instruction.

Dual language programs: Programs in which ELLs from a single language background and native speakers of English attend classes together and receive content instruction in both languages. Also called “two-way immersion.”

Transitional bilingual programs: Programs in which students receive subject area instruction in their first language while receiving ESL instruction. The home language is phased out as students become more fluent in English.

Heritage language programs: Programs in which students with some proficiency in the language of their parents or ancestors take courses in this language to maintain and improve fluency and literacy skills.



Other terms to know:

ACCESS for ELLs: The acronym stands for “Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners.” It is a test of academic English that was developed by WIDA (World-Class Instruction Design and Assessment consortium) and is used in Pennsylvania and several other states to monitor ELL students’ annual progress. The WIDA ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT) is given once as a tool to determine initial ESL level placement.

BCA: “Bilingual Counselor Assistant,” whose job is to translate school documents and act as translator and liaison between ELL families and schools.

FERPA: “Family Education Rights and Privacy Act,” a Federal law that puts strict limits on schools’ ability to release a student’s school records to anyone, including federal immigration officers, without express permission from the student’s parents.

HLS: “Home Language Survey,” given to parents upon enrolling their children in Pennsylvania public schools to determine whether students should be tested for English proficiency.

Newcomer centers: Program model for high school ELLs whose needs are underserved in traditional language support programs – students with low levels of literacy in their native language, students who have had limited formal schooling, and students who enroll late in the school year. Programs may focus on native language literacy, orientation to local community and schools, and basic content courses.

OLCA: “Office of Language, Culture, and the Arts,” the School District office created by former CEO Paul Vallas to support ELL students.

PHLOTE: “Primary or Home Language Other Than English,” as determined by the Home Language Survey.

S21 Screen: The system in which the District updates and maintains information about ELLs, ESOL level, home language, and testing results.

Y.S., et al. v. School District of Philadelphia: A 1986 class-action suit on behalf of Asian students that resulted in a mandate for the District to provide evaluation, counseling, and parent communications in the students’ home languages.

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