

# EVALUATION OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS IN RIVER FOREST SCHOOL DISTRICT D90

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# EVALUATION OF POLICIES AND PRACTICES FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

## IN RIVER FOREST SCHOOL DISTRICT D90

### SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

During the fall of 2020, District 90 asked the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) to conduct an evaluation of policies and practices for English Learners (ELs) for the purpose of identifying areas for improvement. This report is based primarily upon interview sessions with staff from central office, the two elementary schools, and the middle school in D90. The report provides a description of current circumstances as described by interviewees, followed by research-informed recommendations from CAL. The report addresses the following aspects of effectively educating ELs:

- District-level and School-level EL Services
- Identification, Placement, Exiting and Monitoring
- EL Student Performance
- Special Education Identification, Services and Exiting EL Services
- Professional Development
- Curriculum and Resources
- Family and Community
- Equity and Inclusion

### SECTION 2: METHODOLOGY

The CAL investigator spent two days conducting one-to-one interviews in Zoom meetings on December 3 and 4, 2020. Ten D90 staff members representing central office and school level personnel who provide a variety of services to ELs were interviewed. The interview protocols were based on research-based principles of effective instruction for ELs as identified by CAL. The interviews were recorded so that the CAL investigator could replay as needed to ensure accuracy of understanding. To ensure confidentiality, individual roles and responses are not reported and all data in this report is aggregated in such a way as to not reveal individual identities.

CAL also reviewed available demographic and English language and reading and math achievement data from the district, together with a 2-slide overview of the district's strategic plan.

A draft report was provided by CAL to D90 for review to ensure clarity and accuracy, and the final report was developed based on a review by the district.

### SECTION 3: LIMITATIONS

The Covid-19 pandemic prevented an on-site visit by CAL staff to the district that would have included in-person interviews and direct observation of classroom practice. As a result, the report does not include a review of instructional methods used by teachers. That said, the Zoom interviews provided a satisfactory vehicle for collecting self-reported information about other programmatic aspects of effective education for ELs; they offered CAL the opportunity to speak with staff in an interruption-free and communication-friendly setting.

### SECTION 4: DESCRIPTION OF ENGLISH LEARNERS IN D90

The population of ELs in River Forest is small but super diverse. Superdiversity, according to a recent report by the Migration Policy Institute, refers to the diversification of communities along several dimensions, “including languages spoken, race and ethnicity, countries of origin, socioeconomic status, levels of education, and modes of arrival and migration history” (Maki, Zong & Batalova, 2018, p.6).

During the 2020-2021 school year, the 37 identified ELs in D90 came from 12 different language backgrounds (Table 1). As reported by interviewees, the population of ELs included two distinct profiles of students: transient students who are in D90 for a limited number of years as children of families who are in the U.S. temporarily for educational purposes associated with the two universities in the area; and students who live in the D90 boundary and who are in the U.S. to stay. As the families who are associated with the universities are often better off financially than the families of ELs who live in the district, the population of ELs in D90 represents both low-income and non-low-income families. Education level is often a reflection of socio-economic status. It is clear that the population of ELs in D90 represents two different populations of EL students whose educational needs also differ.

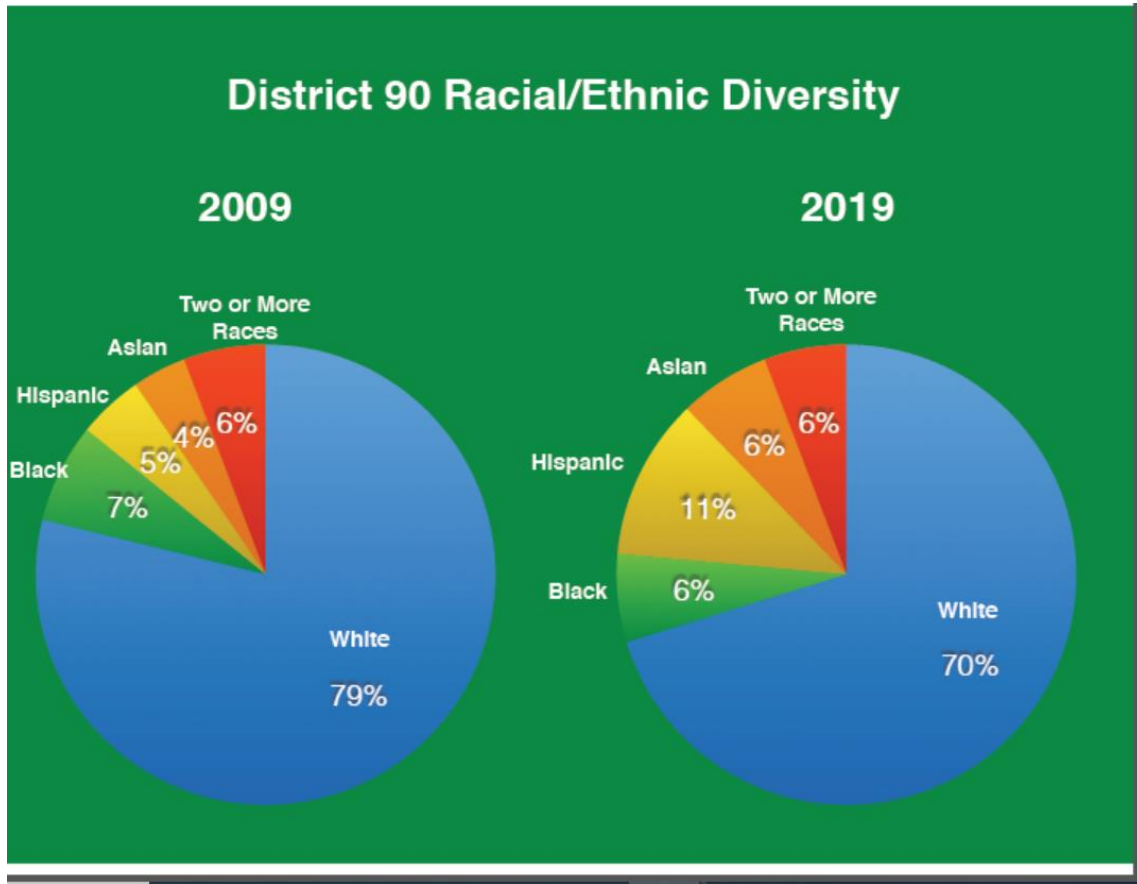
Table 1. ELs by school and home language (source: D90 Curriculum and Instruction, 11/20).

River Forest District 90  
 Linguistic Diversity  
 2020-21 School Year

Language	Willard Elementary	Lincoln Elementary	Roosevelt Middle
Spanish	5	-	3
Mandarin	2	-	3
Portuguese	1	-	1
Albanian	1	-	1
Arabic	2	1	1
Korean	1	-	3
Ukrainian	-	-	1
Thai	-	-	1
Polish	4	2	-
Russian	-	1	-
French	-	2	-
Vietnamese	1	-	-
<b>Total EL Students</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>14</b>

Although only anecdotal evidence for a growth in the population of ELs was provided via the interviews (a staff person reported the caseload of ELs doubling in the last few years), there is evidence of an increase in racial/ethnic diversity in D90 between 2009 and 2019 (Table 2.). One respondent said that there is extremely low enrollment of ELs in one of the elementary schools this school year. The reason is not known although it could be that the pandemic is inhibiting university enrollment in the U.S. by foreign nationals and thus affecting the number of families enrolling their EL children in D90.

Table 2. Racial/ethnic diversity in D90 in 2009 and 2019.



**SECTION 5: DISTRICT-LEVEL EL SERVICES**

Oversight of EL services falls under the purview of the director of curriculum and instruction (C&I) and somewhat, de facto, to the EL teacher with the greatest longevity in the district. One interviewee referred to this individual as the “EL coordinator.” When asked about the title, the interviewee responded that she was referring to the EL teacher who had served in D90 for the longest time. The C&I director has taken responsibility for some compliance processes related to identification and exiting procedures and parental notification, such as ensuring that ESSA-required parent notification letters are sent to parents/guardians informing them that their children are entitled to EL services. The C&I director has also reserved money in the annual budget each year to provide materials to the EL teachers and has facilitated administrative meetings for EL teachers. The investigator was unable to find information on the River Forest Public Schools website that speaks to policies and services for ELs.

## SECTION 6: SCHOOL-LEVEL EL SERVICES

There are 3 EL teachers serving the three D90 schools. The first EL teacher was hired in 2005 to provide services to ELs in D90 in one of the two elementary schools. In the current school year, services are provided by qualified EL teachers in the two elementary and one middle school as follows:

- Willard ES: one .85 position
- Lincoln ES: one full-time position
- Roosevelt MS: one .5 position

In each of the schools, the EL teacher works collaboratively with general education teachers to plan the program of instruction for the students. In every case, under non-pandemic circumstances, the EL teacher provides both push-in services (goes into the general education classroom) and pull-out services (takes the EL students to a separate location for services). EL services are viewed as required services independent of MTSS tiered intervention services, although it was not clear whether EL services are considered Tier 1 or Tier 2 intervention.

Benchmarking assessments and holistic looks at student performance at pre-determined cycles during the school year include a review of EL student performance. These reviews impact services provided by the EL teacher (whether consultative or direct services).

One of the elementary EL teachers has no permanent space in which to provide services, while the other EL teachers have been allocated physical space in their respective schools to pull out students for instruction. At the middle school, the EL teacher has a “big” corner of the library media center that, albeit without windows, comfortably seats up to “about 8” students. At the elementary school, the teacher has a “nice” office space in the library that can accommodate four to five students.

## SECTION 7: DISTRICT AND SCHOOL-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

It is commendable that general education and EL teachers have a close and collaborative relationship and that the MTSS cycles of review help EL teachers to be better informed about the needs of their students.

There is a need in D90 for personnel with qualifications and/or experiences in providing educational services to ELs to provide oversight and guidance to the program. This could continue to include an EL teacher; however, if that is the case, this would be made formal and the teacher would be provided with time and pay for the additional duties.

All of the EL teachers should be provided with the physical space they need to serve their students at times when meaningful services cannot be provided in the general education classroom.

## SECTION 8: IDENTIFICATION, PLACEMENT, EXITING AND MONITORING

Interviewees had varying degrees of knowledge about the process for identification, placement, exiting and monitoring of ELs. Half of the respondents were unable to clearly describe how students are identified as ELs in D90. Eventually, the picture emerged that a Home Language Survey (HLS) is completed by every family in D90 upon enrollment and, if the HLS reveals that a student has a language other than English spoken at home or speaks a language other than English, testing of English language proficiency (ELP) is triggered. The testing is done by the EL teachers in the schools. If the student is found not to be proficient in English, the student is to be served with EL services (provided that the parent has not exercised their right to opt out), and the EL teacher has primary responsibility for the development and implementation of program services.

Although the state (and federal) policy states that students identified as ELs on the English language proficiency screener test are to receive services unless their parent/guardian formally declines services, it was reported that students who are at the upper levels of English proficiency may not receive services, while students who are not formally identified may receive services (for example, students who exited in earlier grades are provided with services in later grades if they are having academic difficulty). The middle school population includes fourteen identified students, five of whom are reportedly not receiving services based on parental refusal. Records do not appear to be maintained about parent opt-out of EL programming. The policy for serving pre-school children was unclear.

The parents of students did not receive information formally regarding their children taking an English language proficiency test based on the outcome of the HLS, although EL teachers often informed parents of this verbally. If students were found to be eligible for EL services, a letter developed by the central administration was sent to parents in accordance with ESSA mandates, informing them of the child's ELP status, program offered and the right to opt out of services. The assessment results are maintained in Power School, the district's data management system. Records were not maintained about parents who opt out of services for their child. It was unclear as to whether annual ELP testing results are maintained in Power School and how accessible the information is to teachers. At the very least, many respondents were not aware of the availability of this data.

Some of the interviewees spoke of teachers making recommendations to EL teachers for students to be tested for ELP. This should not be the case if the HLS survey is being used as it should.

Most respondents believed that students are exited (reclassified) out of the Language Instructional Education Program (LIEP) based on the ACCESS test. A letter is not formally sent to parents letting students know that their child has exited, although EL teachers mentioned providing information to parents verbally. The requirement for monitoring post-reclassification appeared to be conducted as part of the overall MTSS process in which all students were



monitored throughout the year for challenges and interventions. EL teachers reported being informed when exited students needed additional supports and were engaged in providing said support.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Unfortunately, the identification of students for EL services did not appear to be completely systematic. All ELs should be formally identified to receive services. By all means, collaboration between general education and EL teachers should take place to ensure the coordination of instruction, but the EL teacher case load should not be predicated on teacher recommendation. This includes the formal identification of students who are not performing well after reclassification and who must return to EL services based on monitoring for two years after exiting (U.S. Department of Justice & U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. 34).

It is commendable that EL families receive the federally required parental notification letter informing them of their child's English language proficiency (ELP) status and eligibility for EL services. It is also important that families of ELs are formally made aware of the initial ELP screening and informed when their student exits the program based on ACCESS scores and that their child will be monitored for two years to ensure success in the general education program without special language services and about all other essential information pertaining to their child's education (U.S. Department of Justice & U.S. Department of Education, 2015, pp. 37-38).

All teachers who serve ELs should know about information that is available in Power School about the beginning and annual English proficiency levels of their EL students (as well as any other information collected about the student) and this information should be easily accessible.

There should be policies and practices in place for identification and services to pre-school ELs. Illinois State Board of Education requirements for serving ELs in preschool programs can be found here: [https://www.isbe.net/Documents/preschool\\_faq.pdf](https://www.isbe.net/Documents/preschool_faq.pdf)

## SECTION 9: EL STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Anecdotally, based on interview responses, EL students in D90 are regarded as doing grade-level, standards-based work differentiated for their language proficiency levels.

Formal achievement data for 2019 taken from the state report card for D90 for ELs showed that the EL sub-group taking the English Language Arts test had the highest percentage of students among subgroups in the “did not meet” categories (47%), and three-quarters of the EL group were in the three categories below “meets” (Table 3.). In mathematics, 20% of the EL group were in the “did not meet” category with 80% of the students in the 3 categories beneath “meets” (Table 4.). These results are not completely unexpected given that the tests are in English and the

students are still learning English. To better gauge EL performance on these tests, looking at results for former EL student who have exited services are more revealing. Even looking at EL performance by ELP levels on the reading and math test would be more productive since expectations would be that students at higher levels of English proficiency will do better on these tests than students with lower levels of English.

Table 3. IL. Assessment of Readiness, ELA, 2019.

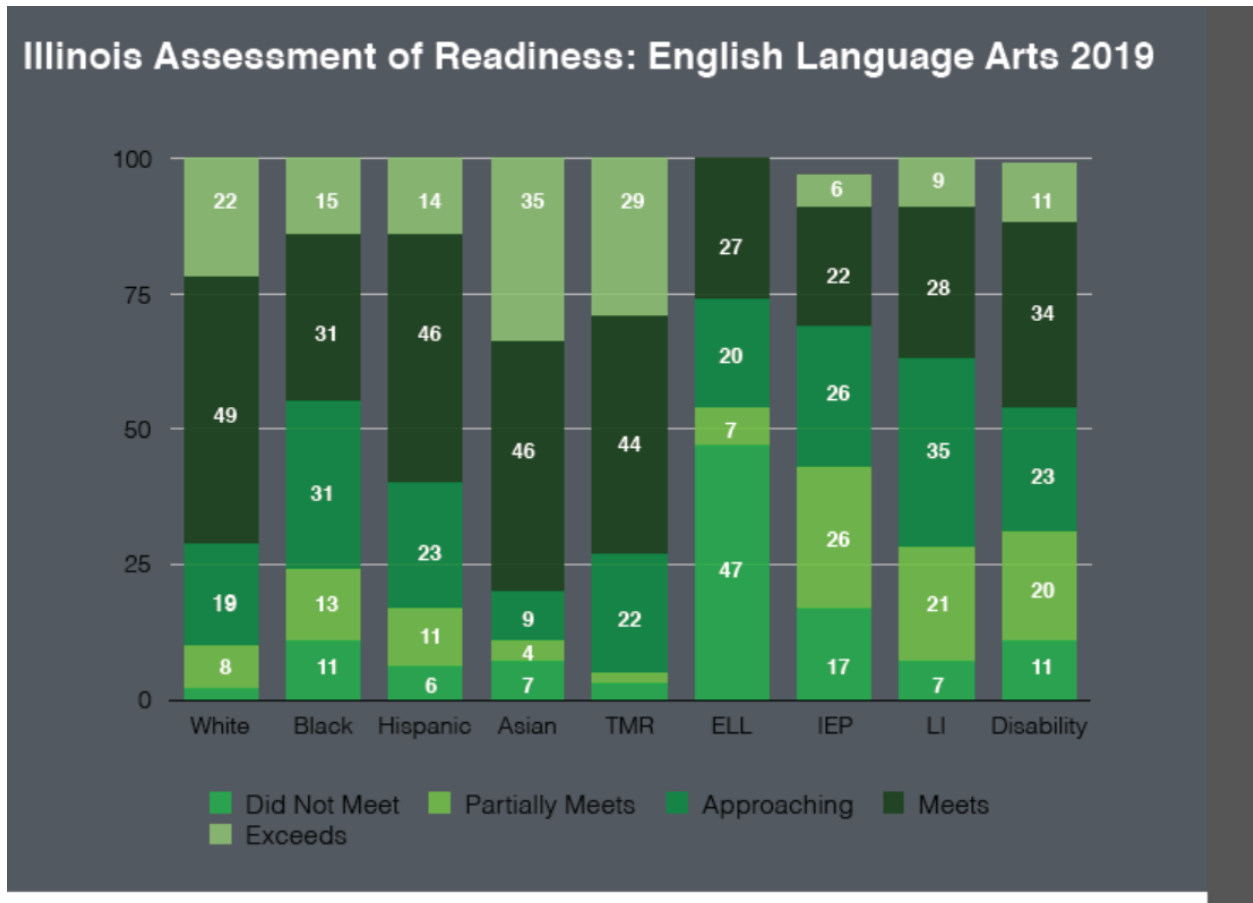
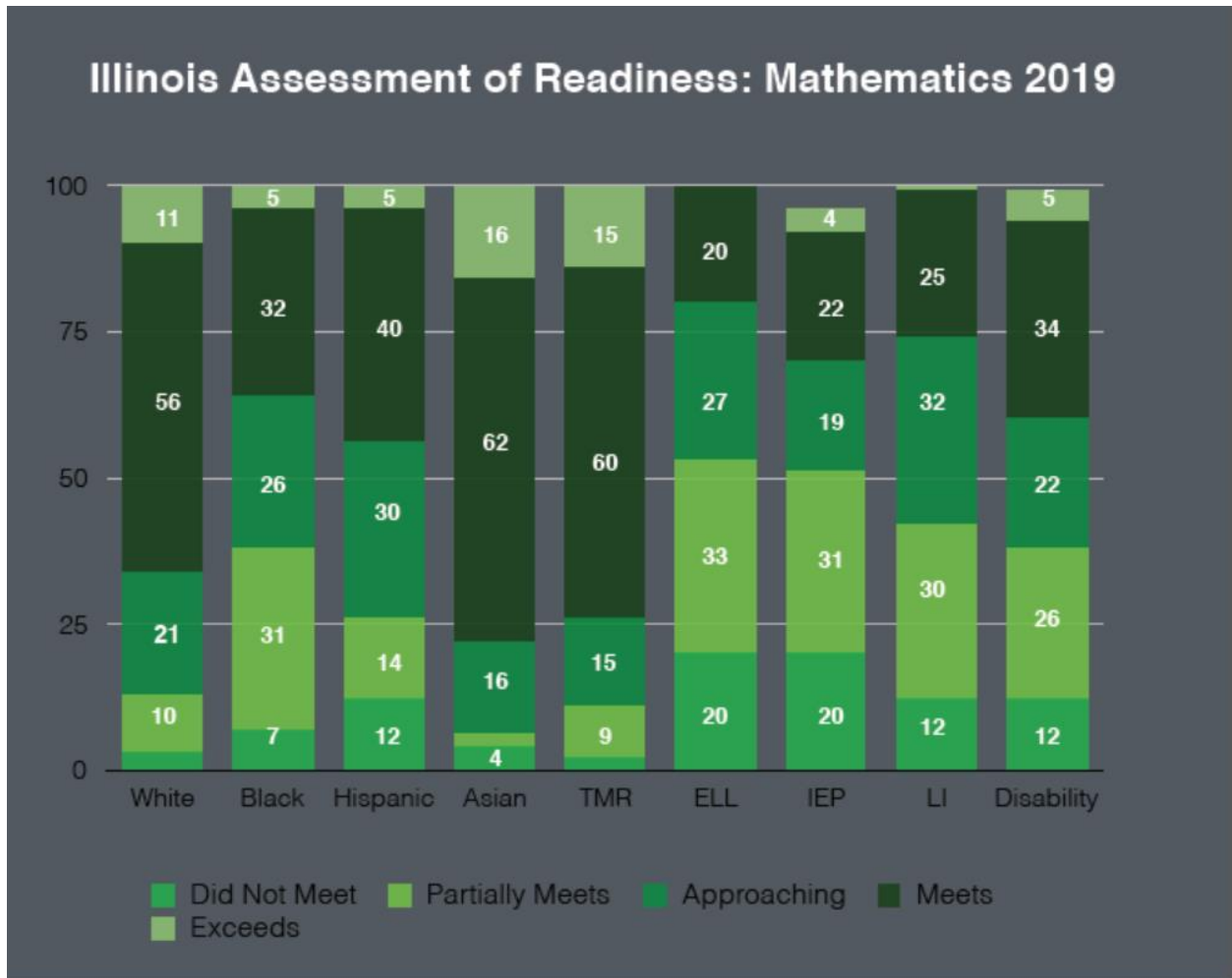


Table 4. IL. Assessment of Readiness, Mathematics, 2019



State report data for 2019 for D90 also included information about ELs in regard to chronic absenteeism and student mobility. According to this data, ELs had the highest rate of absenteeism in D90 and the highest rate of mobility. A reason for the absenteeism among ELs is not apparent but the mobility rate could be attributed to the transience of the international student population. This would need further investigation.

Table 5. IL. State Report, D90 Chronic Absenteeism and Student Mobility, 2019

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATE												
	All	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Native Hawaiian /Pacific Islander	American Indian	Two or More Races	Children with Disabilities	Students with IEPs	English Learners	Low Income
District	4.8%	5.1%	4.5%	6.0%	2.5%	*	*	1.2%	8.7%	10.4%	11.4%	7.5%
State	17.5%	12.8%	30.5%	18.5%	8.7%	17.8%	23.8%	19.7%	25.4%	25.3%	17.2%	25.4%

STUDENT MOBILITY RATE														
	All	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Native Hawaiian /Pacific Islander	American Indian	Two or More Races	Children with Disabilities	Students with IEPs	English Learners	Low Income
District	2.2%	2.7%	1.7%	1.8%	5.3%	1.8%	8.5%	*	*	0.0%	2.7%	3.6%	19.4%	4.1%
State	7.1%	7.5%	6.7%	4.7%	14.0%	6.7%	6.2%	8.8%	10.3%	8.3%	8.7%	9.8%	8.4%	9.7%

Students with IEPs are those eligible to receive special education services.

The district provided aggregated ACCESS English language proficiency outcome data for the years 2017-2019. This data would be more helpful for evaluation purposes were the district to look longitudinally by student. One would want to look at the date of identification as an EL and the date of exiting to determine how long ELs remain in English learner status in D90 and to look at whether ELs are making acceptable progress toward English proficiency from year to year.

The table below (Table 6.) provides little information of value. It tells us that there were 29 ELs in 2019 in D90, 25 of whom took the annual ACCESS test, of which, five of the students were found to be English proficient. Not knowing when the 29 students entered U.S. schooling, we don't know if 5 students becoming proficient is reasonable. The data also leave us asking two questions: why did 4 students not take the test and why is there no data for long-term ELs (was the n size too small in both cases or, in the case of the long-term ELs, were there no long-term ELs)?

Table. 6. IL. State Report, D90 ELs Determined to be English Proficient based ACCESS testing (2019)

EL PROFICIENCY ON ACCESS							
	# ELS	# Tested	% Participation	# Proficient	% Proficient	# Long Term EL	% Long Term EL
District	29	25	86.3%	5	19.2%	*	*
State	216,769	213,835	98.7%	18,468	8.6%	28,216	13.0%

## RECOMMENDATIONS

A review of the reading and mathematics assessments showed that ELs as a sub-group are not doing well on these tests. However, that is not unexpected for tests that are not normed by English language proficiency. It is recommended that the district begin to look more deeply at the academic achievement results of ELs (by looking at the performance of former ELs and the outcomes by proficiency levels of current ELs (even if it means for internal purposes only if the n numbers are too small to make public). It is advisable to investigate mobility and absenteeism for this population. Both variables have an impact on performance.

The English language proficiency data should be analyzed (and reported whenever the n size is large enough) longitudinally so that the district can ascertain if ELs are exiting from the program in reasonable amounts of time and are not languishing as long-term ELs (usually defined as ELs who have been in the status of EL for six years or longer). It is important to capture this information so that ELs who are not progressing as they should receive the instruction they need.

### SECTION 10: SPECIAL EDUCATION IDENTIFICATION, SERVICES AND EXITING EL SERVICES

Of the interviewees asked about the identification of ELs for special education services, few interviewees were able to accurately describe the process for identifying ELs with disabilities. It was reported by the interviewees themselves that greater guidance is needed by staff on policy and practice related to EL and special education services for ELs identified with disabilities.

ELs who are identified as having a disability are referred to as dual-identified students and, based on civil rights requirements, are to receive both the language instructional education program (LIEP) and special education services, and Individual Education Plans (IEPs) must include the language needs of the students (U.S. Department of Justice & U.S. Department of Education, 2015, pp.24-27). This was a point of contention in D90. It appeared that IEPs do not include language needs, and that special education and EL educators do not collaborate to provide services to dual-identified students. In the case of some respondents, this was expressed as special education services taking precedence over English language services. This meant that dual-identified students were not always provided with EL services or services were provided through consultation only. The latter scenario applied to ELs with significant cognitive disabilities (including non-verbal) and in cases where the ELs were at an advanced level of ELP, albeit not yet exited.

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) at the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and the Civil Rights Division at the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) *Dear Colleague Letter: English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents* (2015), cited elsewhere in this report, is a good resource for determining legal obligations for identifying and serving ELs with disabilities.

The *Dear Colleague* letter is unequivocal in stating the requirement that ELs with disabilities are to receive both services:

*School districts must provide EL students with disabilities with both the language assistance and disability-related services to which they are entitled under Federal law. Districts must inform a parent of an EL student with an individualized education program (IEP) how the language instruction education program meets the objectives of the child's IEP. The Departments are aware that some school districts have a formal or informal policy of "no dual services," i.e., a policy of allowing students to receive either EL services or special education services, but not both. Other districts have a policy of delaying disability evaluations of EL students for special education and related services for a specified period of time based on their EL status.<sup>64</sup> These policies are impermissible under the IDEA and Federal civil rights laws, and the Departments expect SEAs to address these policies in monitoring districts' compliance with Federal law. Further, even if a parent of an EL student with a disability declines disability related services under the IDEA or Section 504, that student with a disability remains entitled to all EL rights and services as described in this guidance. (pp. 24-25)*

Staff themselves called for greater collaboration between special education teachers and EL teachers, for example, in regard to how dual certified ELs are served by EL teachers (how much time they are given, and what the learning objectives are) and IEPs do not include learning goals for English language proficiency. Staff also sought greater policy guidance on what EL services are, and are not, required, especially as related to students with severe disabilities. One other dilemma is the decision that must be made when an EL student has a disability that will impact their ability to ever pass an English language proficiency test and, therefore is exited from EL service without passing the ELP test.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The district needs to attend to the three major areas regarding ELs and disabilities: identification, services, and exiting.

The *Dear Colleague* letter has clear guidance in respect to evaluating ELs for special education services:

*SEAs and school districts must ensure that all EL students who may have a disability, like all other students who may have a disability and need services under IDEA or Section 504, are located, identified, and evaluated for special education and disability-related services in a timely manner. When conducting such evaluations, school districts must consider the English language proficiency of EL students in determining the appropriate assessments and other evaluation materials to be used. School districts must not identify or determine that EL*

*students are students with disabilities because of their limited English language proficiency. (p. 25)*

*Under the IDEA, school districts must also identify, locate, and evaluate all children who may have disabilities and who need special education and related services, regardless of the severity of their disabilities. A parent or a school district may initiate a request for an initial evaluation to determine if a child is a child with a disability under the IDEA.<sup>69</sup> A school district must ensure that assessments and other evaluation materials used to evaluate a child with a disability are “provided and administered in the child’s native language or other mode of communication and in the form most likely to yield accurate information on what the child knows and can do academically, developmentally, and functionally, unless it is clearly not feasible to so provide or administer.”<sup>70</sup> This is true even for those EL students whose parents have opted their children out of EL programs.<sup>71</sup> A student cannot be determined to be a child with a disability if the “determinant factor” is limited English proficiency and if the student does not otherwise meet the definition of a “child with a disability” under the IDEA.<sup>72</sup>(pp.24-25)*

As mentioned above, dual identified students are to receive both special education and EL services:

*Once a school district determines that an EL student is a child with a disability under the IDEA and needs special education and related services, the school district is responsible for determining, through the development of an IEP at a meeting of the IEP Team (which includes the child’s parents and school officials), the special education and related services necessary to make FAPE available to the child.<sup>73</sup> As part of this process, the IDEA requires that the IEP team consider, among other special factors, the language needs of a child with limited English proficiency as those needs relate to the child’s IEP.<sup>74</sup> To implement this requirement, it is essential that the IEP team include participants who have the requisite knowledge of the child’s language needs. To ensure that EL children with disabilities receive services that meet their language and special education needs, it is important for members of the IEP team to include professionals with training, and preferably expertise, in second language acquisition and an understanding of how to differentiate between the student’s limited English proficiency and the student’s disability.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, the IDEA requires that the school district “take whatever action is necessary to ensure that the parent understands the proceedings of the IEP team meeting, including arranging for an interpreter for parents with deafness or whose native language is other than English.” (pp. 26-27)*

A 2018 presentation by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) on the topic of identifying and serving ELs with disabilities is available here: <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/English-Learners-with-Disabilities.pdf>

Making the decision to exit a dual identified student from EL services is often difficult because the disability itself can make assessing English proficiency difficult. In fact, it may be the disability and not English proficiency that is preventing the student from passing the ELP tests. California has been more proactive in this regard than many other states. The California Department of Education (CDE) has developed policies and guidance that provide more support to districts and schools on this issue than most states. A power point providing sample guidance in response to the CDE policies' team approach and the evidence that can be applied to ascertaining whether a dual identified student can be reclassified developed by the Special Education Local Plan Area for Ventura County CA. is available at <https://www.vcselpa.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=vFR6rNr7JuA%3D&portalid=0>

Clear policies regarding dual identified students in accordance with federal and state regulations should be in place and shared with all staff. Cross-training for EL and special education staff and teachers on identifying, serving, exiting and including parents of ELs in all aspects of the process is needed in D90 as well. General education teachers who serve ELs must also have an understanding of how normal second language development is different from challenges posed by disabilities. The *U.S. Department of Education English Learner Toolkit, Chapter 6 Tools and Resources for Addressing English Learners with Disabilities* (2016) provides charts for educators to compare learning behaviors due to second language acquisition to possible learning disabilities (pp. 6-10).

The goal must be for EL and special education teachers to collaborate closely to meet the needs of dual identified students. It will be very important for all of the dual-identified students' teachers to have ready access to information about the ELs they serve: most importantly, ELP levels across language domains (reading, writing, listening, speaking), first language, country of origin and previous educational and life experiences. It is not uncommon for teachers who serve dual-identified students to become dual-certified or endorsed so that they can provide language-informed, special education services as individual professionals. The district should seek to encourage and support the attainment of dual certification for some of their special education and EL teachers.

## SECTION 11: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Although the EL staff met on occasion under the leadership of the C&I director on administrative matters related to serving ELs, general educators who serve ELs have not received training on serving this population of students. River Forest staff expressed repeatedly that teachers in the district's schools are oriented toward collaboration, are open to learning, and want to effectively serve ELs, but may need focused professional development (PD) on meeting the



needs of language learners. In fact, there was unanimous agreement on the part of all interviewees that staff would benefit from PD on serving ELs.

The topics that were recommended for PD for general educators by interviewees included the following:

- Understanding the EL program
- Understanding normal patterns of second language acquisition
- Adopting methods for integrating language and content instruction
- Developing cultural competency

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Both designated ESL teachers and general teachers who serve ELs should be provided with professional development on effectively educating ELs. Methods for serving ELs, like the SIOP model, in fact, benefit many kinds of learners. In addition to the topics listed above, both ESL and general education teachers would benefit from PD that teaches strategies for including ELs in the readers' and writers' workshop. Understanding second language development is a particularly important aspect of being able to distinguish learning challenges due to language as opposed to challenges based on learning disabilities. It is also critical that teachers, especially those who may not have had substantive previous experiences working with or living side by side with families of different linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds from their own, would benefit from having critical conversations from the perspective of White teachers serving diverse populations (Delano-Oriaran & Meidl, 2013).

## SECTION 12: CURRICULUM & RESOURCES

Most staff reported that there is a superabundance of resources and materials available to teachers in D90. Central office funding is set aside for EL teachers who are asked annually if they are in need of materials. Only one of the teachers voiced a lack of materials: in that case, for students beyond the newcomer level at the intermediate level of English.

There appears to be a great deal of assistive technology that is used to modify grade-level work for special education students, including, for example, audio text-to-speech and speech-to-text supports. These kinds of digital support features could be well used by teachers of ELs, not only during pandemic-induced virtual instruction but in face-to-face instruction once the pandemic ends.

When asked about culturally responsive materials and resources, the investigator was informed by multiple parties that D90 has recently embarked on a systematic purge of resources and reading materials that reflect stereotypes of minoritized groups and had purchased multicultural

resources and materials that are culturally responsive with fair representations of non-dominant cultures.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The district is commended for undertaking a review of its materials and resources to ensure that outdated and inappropriate depictions of minoritized groups are exchanged for materials and resources that fairly and non-stereotypically represent students from a variety of backgrounds and cultures. The next step (and perhaps this is already in the works) would be to include materials that focus on the anti-bias curriculum. Some resources for teaching the anti-bias curriculum and teaching for social justice, including social-justice standards, can be found here:

Teaching Tolerance

<https://www.tolerance.org/>

<https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources>

<https://www.tolerance.org/frameworks/social-justice-standards>

Teaching for Change

<https://www.teachingforchange.org/>

<https://socialjusticebooks.org/booklists/>

Rethinking Schools

<https://rethinkingschools.org/>

<https://rethinkingschools.org/articles/teaching-the-radical-rosa-parks/>

<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/when-bad-things-are-happening>

Zinn Education Project

<https://www.zinnedproject.org/>

It is also commendable that EL teachers report having, for the most part, the materials they need. Teachers should have materials for teaching every level of EL, whether at the beginning, intermediate, or advanced levels of English.

Central office (by way of the Special Education director) procures the services of language interpreters when school staff applies for such services, and the interpreters were deemed of high quality and proficient in the specialized vocabulary of education in the U.S. Additionally, interviewees spoke of having one-to-one communication, usually by text, with families of ELs about important events and their child's progress, and a bilingual secretary serves Spanish-speaking families at one of the elementary schools.

It was reported, however, that most families of ELs did not participate in the life of the school to the degree that families of non-ELs do. It appeared that school staff may not know which families among them need translation or interpretation services to be able to understand school communications.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is commendable that quality language interpretation services are available to schools to be able to communicate effectively with non-English speaking families. The challenge for the district and schools is to identify ways that linguistically and culturally diverse families may play a larger role in school activities and policy matters that affect their children.

Communication with families of ELs is required (U.S. Department of Justice & U.S. Department of Education, 2015, pp. 37-40), and it is especially critical during the current COVID-19 pandemic. It did not appear that the schools maintain information about the preferred language of families so that communication can be provided in the language the families understand. The process for determining if the families of EL students are limited English proficient and their language needs is an obligation of school districts (U.S. Department of Justice & U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p. 38),

## SECTION 14: EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Several interviewees informed the investigator that the pursuit of inclusivity and equity was an initiative of D90. In fact, one of the five goals of the district's strategic plan is "equitable opportunities and resources." It was reported that at one of the schools a committee of staff was devoted to the topic of equity and the PTO had become involved in the effort. When asked about tangible outcomes of the committees' work, most interviewees were not able to provide details. A couple of staff mentioned a cultural evening with food and sharing.

It is important that teachers have the ability to provide culturally responsive and relevant instruction, while gaining cultural competence by taking a critical look at their own culture and cultural identity. Howard (2010) says, "Culturally responsive pedagogy assumes that if teachers are able to make connections between the cultural knowledge, beliefs, and practices that students bring from home, and the content and pedagogy that they use in their classrooms, the academic performance and overall schooling experiences of learners from culturally diverse groups will

improve” (p. 67-69), but that alone will not suffice. Teachers of the dominant culture must also develop cultural competence and have ”the ability to manage the dynamics of difference and conduct ongoing self-assessment” (p.112).

Another goal of the district’s strategic plan is to “recruit, develop, support, and retain high quality, diverse staff.” Yet it was reported that, although there had been a few recent retirements among teachers at one of the schools, none of the vacancies had been filled by teachers of color. Data from 2018-2019 revealed that 90.5% of teachers in D90 were White.

Table 7: Numbers of full-time teachers in D90 and the state of IL. by race/ethnicity (2018-19)

TEACHER INFORMATION (Full-Time Equivalents)											
	Total Number	Male	Female	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Native Hawaiian /Pacific Islander	American Indian	Two or More Races	Unknown
District	119	21.6%	78.4%	90.5%	2.6%	2.8%	3.4%	*	0.9%	^	^
State	130,754	23.2%	76.8%	82.6%	5.9%	6.7%	1.8%	0.1%	0.2%	0.8%	2.2%

Given the amazing array of languages and cultures represented by students in D90, and the goals for inclusion and equity in the district’s strategic plan, the investigator expected more descriptions of ways in which the schools showed value for diverse languages and cultures, and greater diversity in staff.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

It is commendable that D90 has placed equity and the hiring of diverse staff as major goals of the district’s strategic plan. It is also encouraging that at least one of the schools is devoting explicit staff and parental attention to inclusion and equity; holding cultural events like international dinners and fairs is certainly a start. Developing cultural competence involves deep introspection on the part of all staff, families, and community. Lessons could be learned from the Georgetown Day School’s (GDS) focus on equity and inclusion. A private school in Washington, D.C., GDS instituted a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Program in 1999, emphasizing empathy and cultural sensitivity. Although D90 is a public school district, its population of students is not unlike that of GDS. As such, D90 may choose to embark on the kind of dedicated introspection about what diversity, equity and inclusion mean as exemplified by the GDS community. Paying similar attention to equity and inclusion is advisable for D90 in light of its strategic-plan goals and its increasingly diverse population. As an example of such work, here is the GDS mission:

*Georgetown Day School is devoted to continuously building an inclusive community open to a multitude of perspectives. As an inclusive community, we uphold that everyone will engage in the work of social justice within all aspects of school life. We work to ensure that our mission is a living guide that we consistently and honestly act upon and assess. As such, to ensure that we actively live our mission grounded in social justice, equity, and inclusion, we, the GDS community, make the following commitments:*

- *We commit to being a school where students, faculty, staff, families, and alumni feel respected and valued for being their full authentic selves.*
- *We commit to taking responsible action to build a foundation of cultural competency, aimed at lifting the strengths, needs, and experiences of all in our community and beyond.*
- *We commit to proactively design and deliver an inclusive and equitable, student-centered curriculum which honors the diverse identities of all students in our community.*
- *We commit to implementing this curriculum in ways that promote understanding others and ourselves in the world around us.*
- *We commit to learning and growing in the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion and sharing our work forward beyond our school's walls.*
- *We commit to learning intentionally from our mistakes and working to make positive changes in our community and in our world.*
- *We commit to asking for support when engaged in the difficult and complex conversations and challenges before us. We will seek differing perspectives, remaining open-minded to others' views, and listening and withholding judgment when possible.*
- *We commit to intentionally following up on these conversations using compassion, a willingness to work together for positive change, understanding, connection, and growth.*
- *Furthermore, we commit to fostering collegial relationships through interactions that are meaningful, honest, direct and joyful.*

In addition, it may be worth taking the time on the part of D90 staff to review and reflect on whether the strategies for attaining Goal 3 in the strategic plan are true indicators of the goal to hire and support diverse staff.

1. *Ensure that staff are equipped to use evidence-based instructional practices and technology to make learning engaging, relevant, and inspiring.*
2. *Improve opportunities for staff collaboration, engagement, innovation, and use of data.*

More appropriate indicators might be maintaining data on the number of annual vacancies and the numbers of those vacancies filled by high quality diverse staff, and evidence of if and how the diverse staff is developed, supported, and retained.

## SECTION 15: CONCLUSION

The River Forest District serves an increasingly diverse community with respect to race, ethnicity, language, culture, and socio-economic status. It is a district that has rich resources, collaborative and dedicated staff, and committed parents. The district should be applauded for its focus on equity and inclusion in its strategic plan. Improving services under the auspices of equity and inclusion for ELs and their families will serve as opportunity for the district to share its wealth with all families in the district, modeling for students how adults act, and what adults do, when they truly work for equity and inclusion.

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