

Understanding the Classroom Experiences of Elementary English Learners in Los Angeles County

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Students in Los Angeles County come from 156 unique language backgrounds (CDE Data Quest, 2024-25.)

"It is important to build a good relationship with students and provide many ways to practice English."

- Teacher of English Learners in L.A. County

Introduction

Los Angeles County is home to about 10 million residents and is one of the most linguistically diverse regions in the nation, educating more than 1.3 million K-12 students across 80 districts. Over 228,000 are English learners (ELs), underscoring a vital need for high-quality English language development (ELD). As California advances multilingualism through Prop. 58 and Global California 2030, the vision must match practice. Without systems of support, many elementary ELs risk becoming Long-Term English Learners (LTELs), often struggling academically due to stalled progress, unable to access advanced secondary courses limiting academic opportunities. Ensuring ELs receive targeted, research-aligned instruction is not only a legal and academic responsibility, it is an equity imperative. ***This brief highlights findings from a 2025 study to understand the classroom experiences of elementary English learners and is designed to inform and guide those committed to advancing equity, academic excellence, and linguistic justice for all.***

Findings

This research brief amplifies participants' teaching backgrounds with ELs, the strategies employed in the classroom, methods of connecting with students and families, and their needs to best serve their students. Findings are based on the analysis of a county-wide survey, which included 189 participants and focus group interviews with twelve educators. Participants were teachers, teachers on special assignment, principals, district-level administrators, resource specialists, and EL instructional coaches.

- 1: Of the participants, 47% identified as having been English learners and nearly 70% reported speaking another language with sufficient proficiency to engage in conversation.
- 2: Respondents indicate familiarity with ELD strategies but want training on differentiating instruction for ELs.
- 3: While many are aware of how ELs are classified and *reclassified*, some respondents are unfamiliar with these processes.
- 4: A majority of educators report that ELs *have opportunities* to develop their home language in school and stated they celebrate EL progress.
- 5: Teachers want to improve their practices in *moving ELs to reclassification*.



"Valuing their first language has been impactful because it builds relationships and eases the transition to English."

- Mandarin Dual Language
Immersion Teacher
in L.A. County

Recommendations

Schools can take actionable steps to better support ELs. From enhancing collaborative learning structures to elevating the visibility of student progress, these strategies are rooted in what teachers have identified as critical to student success. These recommendations align with California's multilingual goals while addressing the needs educators expressed in the study. Implemented with intention, these steps can make a difference in supporting English learners' academic growth and sense of belonging without overwhelming already stretched systems.

1: Prioritize Ongoing, Collaborative Professional Learning Focused on English Learners

Move beyond one-time workshops by establishing regular, structured collaboration time centered on ELs.

2: Strengthen Educator Understanding of English Learner Classification and Reclassification

Provide clear, consistent training on how ELs are identified and reclassified.

3: Celebrate Progress in English Language Development

Acknowledge ELs' academic and linguistic growth publicly. Regular progress monitoring and visible recognition of reclassification help motivate students and validate their success.

4: Expand Access to Dual Language Immersion Programs

Promote Dual Language Immersion (DLI) programs, leveraging the home language as an instructional asset.

5: Focus on Instruction

Help teachers broaden their toolkit with a reliable set of ELD strategies to differentiate instruction.

Let us hold high expectations, act with urgency, and collectively improve outcomes for all English learners.

We thank those who generously shared their experiences, insights, and hopes for supporting English learners across Los Angeles County.



Stay tuned for the release of the full report! Scan the QR code to subscribe to our newsletter so you don't miss it.



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