English Learners and the COVID Pandemic: Prioritizing Developmentally Appropriate Practice that Values Language and Cultural Diversity

Working document (last updated August 18, 2020)
Increase in Number of ELs in and Outside Chicago Between 2005 and 2018

SOURCE: Latino Policy Forum analysis, ISBE FY18 data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of EL Students</th>
<th>In Chicago</th>
<th>Outside Chicago</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>156,350</td>
<td>67,466</td>
<td>88,884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>246,848</td>
<td>75,136</td>
<td>171,712</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within Illinois:

- 63% of ELs concentrated in PreK-3rd grade
- 22% of preschoolers are EL
- 136 language represented, 71% Spanish-speaking
- 50% of children of immigrant parents live in low-income families
Huge Personal Financial Losses and Stress

(Which of these circumstances are true for you/household due to coronavirus outbreak? Percent “yes” illustrated)

58% of Latino households in Illinois have experienced either a job loss or a pay cut. 15% had BOTH job losses and pay cuts.

More than one out of four (27%) of Latino households in Illinois have experienced job loss.

27% have lost their employer-provided health insurance.

Source: SOMOS UNIDOSUS Latino Survey May 10-16, 2020 (Illinois N=250) MoE +/- 6.2%
Hard Hits to Latino Parents in Illinois with Children in School

• 85% of Latino parents in Illinois worry their kids are falling behind because they’ve missed so much school.

• 46% attempted to act as the home-school teacher to their children as schools went online.

• 36% indicate online school has been difficult due to technical problems.

• 31% do not have enough computer equipment to accommodate everyone in the home who is now working and going to school online.

Source: SOMOS UNIDOSUS Latino Survey May 10-16, 2020 (Illinois N=250) MoE +/- 6.2%
Preliminary Recommendation Development

- **Intended audience:** community-based and school leaders charged with making budgetary decisions for EL education across preK-3rd grade settings. For schools, this can include board members, superintendents, Chief Executive Officers, curriculum directors, business officials/Chief Financial Officers, and EL program directors.

- Funders and decision-makers will also find these preliminary ideas useful for supporting EL achievement.

*As we navigate uncharted territory, the Forum is continually consulting with various stakeholders. All preliminary recommendations are subject to change.*
Overarching Preliminary Recommendations

- **Recommendation # 1:** Partner with community organizations to provide the basic needs and wrap around services to support vulnerable immigrant communities.

- **Recommendation # 2:** Develop plans for developmentally appropriate remote learning that is both digital- and non-digital.

- **Recommendation # 3:** Districts must prioritize family engagement and communication efforts—both virtually and in-person—that are responsive to the unique needs of linguistically and culturally diverse communities.

- **Recommendation # 4:** Develop and implement short- and long-term technology plans to promote equitable on-line learning opportunities for low-income immigrant communities.
Preliminary Recommendation # 1: Partner with community organizations to provide the basic needs and wrap around services to support vulnerable immigrant communities. Young students cannot learn if their basic needs and emotional health is not attended to. Young EL students are facing unprecedented challenges given the pandemic. Often their parents are essential workers, living in communities with food insecurity, language barriers, and parents who do not have the formal education to support their child’s educational needs. Educational approaches must prioritize the whole child. Trauma-informed practices and socio-emotional supports must be sensitive to the experience of young learners growing up in these communities.
Ideas for Practice and Potential Areas of Investment

- Collect student and family information districtwide through the development of an intake survey, as suggested by ISBE guidance. The survey should serve as a needs assessment to guide district planning and resource investment, with particular attention to mental health, nutritional, and transportation needs. Surveys must be conducted in a family’s home language.
  
  - Develop a list of bilingual personnel working with different families to coordinate comprehensive outreach.
  - Obtain mental health consent from parents in their home language before the beginning of the school year.
  - Assign bilingual staff to frequently update family contact information and emergency contacts.

- Develop Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with local community organizations to coordinate service delivery and referrals. Districts and communities need to prepare to support families if and when a viral resurgence occurs. Districts must also prepare to support students and families through past traumas that occurred during the shutdown.
  
  - Develop an on-line resource guide in multiple languages posted on the district website and also sent to families that helps connect them to programs and services that alleviate hardships (food pantries, basic toiletries, housing information, testing sites, etc).
  - Communicate specifically, safely, and in multiple languages to undocumented families about social service supports they can access during the pandemic.
  - Develop long-term meal distribution plans, with sensitivity to the possibility of resurgence. Consider contracting a bus to deliver meals for families who lack transportation.
Ideas for Practice and Potential Areas of Investment Cont’d

- Prioritize the provision of mental health services for students and families who are dealing with loss due to the pandemic. These services should be responsive to linguistic and cultural diversity.
  
  • Create mental health/student support service teams (school counselor, social worker, community mental health partners) to develop a transition plan for staff and students that is responsive to cultural and language diversity.
  • When resources and services are limited, districts should consider providing socio-emotional learning and trauma-informed training to educators and staff (see also professional development section).

- Utilize attendance data and log-in participation data to gauge student participation in school. Develop strategic interventions to boost attendance.

- If possible, prioritize vulnerable populations and youngest learners for in-person instruction.
Preliminary Recommendation # 2: Develop plans for developmentally appropriate remote learning that is both digital- and non-digital. Practitioners are seeking comprehensive professional development opportunities specific to teaching young ELs in the pandemic: optimal virtual formats for language and content development, linguistically and culturally responsive socio-emotional learning opportunities, and best practice for connecting with families. The medical field and child development field need to come together to develop recommendations to guide best practice in remote learning for the young child. Guidance from these experts would form the foundation for professional development.
Ideas for Practice and Potential Areas of Investment

Provide professional development for teachers on developmentally appropriate virtual remote learning, with particular attention for children ages three to eight. Engage experts from the medical field, early childhood research, and early elementary to guide this training. Guidance should address:

- How often and for how long should young children be exposed to screen time?
- What types of virtual activities are the most beneficial?
- What is the role of the adult caregiver in mediating these experiences for the young child?
- How can the home language of the EL student be supported through virtual platforms?

Co-develop professional development opportunities with technology teachers, specifically related to the different platforms available for virtual learning.

- Develop an internal internet site staff can access that is continually updated with resources for families, support with technology, and other tools needed to support distance learning. Use this resource for teachers to provide insights on what has worked well and to share best practice ideas.
- Trainings to help teachers record their remote lessons and send to children who are unable to access virtual meetings.
- Provide varied opportunities for educators to trouble-shooting technology questions and provide technical assistance.
- Trainings to help teachers record their remote lessons and send to children who are unable to access virtual meetings.
Ideas for Practice and Potential Areas of Investment Cont’d

- Provide professional development on effective student hands-on activities during remote learning.
  - What kinds of learning can take place with ordinary household objects?
  - How can teachers support parents in engaging their children in activities?
  - How can the school district provide parents with tangible items for carrying out learning activities in the home?
  - How can the activities be structured to attend to linguistic and cultural diversity?

- As part of teacher professional development, provide teacher planning time to coordinate the following:
  - Develop a family needs assessment, as discussed above, to understand what resources families need to support learning (e.g. books, arts and crafts, etc.). Create a plan for distributing resources to families. Encourage teachers to create lesson plans based on the materials. Teachers can also motivate parents to use the materials to supplement learning at home.
  - Seek support of local foundations, business, or community-based organizations to donate to the development of the kits.
  - Have staff create videos unpacking kits/bag and demonstrating how to use materials.
  - Include items and books in the kit that celebrate family language and cultural backgrounds.
Ideas for Practice and Potential Areas of Investment Cont’d

- Provide professional development to inform teachers on how to promote the importance of relationship development with relatives, friends, and families who cannot be seen on a regular basis.

- Provide professional development time and support to teachers to co-create and conduct formative assessments to ascertain the various levels of student learning.

- Provide professional development on trauma-informed training opportunities and tools sensitive to ELs and their families:
  - Consult outside experts trained in childhood trauma and research on Adverse Childhood Experiences to provide staff with strategic support.
  - Invest in additional mental health professional development and training for school counselors and social workers. When possible, seek bilingual professionals.

ISBE Guidance on Screen Time During Remote Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Recommended Length of Sustained Attention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PreK</td>
<td>20 minutes/day</td>
<td>60 minutes/day</td>
<td>3-5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>30 minutes/day</td>
<td>90 minutes/day</td>
<td>3-5 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>45 minutes/day</td>
<td>90 minutes/day</td>
<td>5-10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>60 minutes/day</td>
<td>120 minutes/day</td>
<td>10-15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>Class: 15 minutes/day Total: 90 minutes/day</td>
<td>Class: 30 minutes/day Total: 180 minutes/day</td>
<td>1 subject area or class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>Class: 20 minutes/day Total: 120 minutes/day</td>
<td>Class: 45 minutes/day Total: 270 minutes/day</td>
<td>1 subject area or class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Preliminary Recommendation # 3: Districts must prioritize family engagement and communication efforts—both virtually and in-person—that is responsive to the unique needs of linguistically and culturally diverse communities. Even before the pandemic, inequities existed in the amount of information available to non-English speaking parents. Districts that were proactive in engaging parents of ELs oftentimes relied on face-to-face meetings or gatherings. These parents tend to have unique work schedules, language barriers, and limited access to broadband/internet and technology. Now that in-person meetings are discouraged, districts must be innovative in determining ways to provide parents access to critical information in a timely and safe manner.
Ideas for Practice and Potential Areas of Investment

- Create authentic opportunities to hear from families about what is and is not working in this new learning environment.

- Find opportunities to build off of family’s funds of knowledge.

- Ensure equitable sharing of critical information in multiple languages and in various modes of communication.
  - Provide bilingual staff or translation/interpretation services that will aide with communications with families.
  - Consider how support staff might be able to help students with remote learning activities and also act as a resource when communicating with families. Multilingual families may prefer communication via text or phone.
  - Designate a liaison with whom each family can communicate over the phone, preferably bilingual and culturally sensitive.
  - Encourage staff to use multiple communication tools to opportunities and formats to contact families to inquire about essential needs before asking them to engage in instructional activities (e.g., form, phone call, home visit, “office hours”).
Ideas for Practice and Potential Areas of Investment Cont’d

- Hold office hours during the evening on a weekly basis. Many students may have parents who are considered “essential workers” and work during instruction time. Holding flexible office hours allows student and/or parent to ask questions at a time more accessible to them.

- Provide tutorials for parents about digital learning in multiple languages.

- Develop a communication campaign that provides positive messages to parents in various languages. Have these messages translated and posted in different district communication Forum’s (Twitter, Facebook, newsletter, school bulletin, e-mail, online learning platforms, school website, side of public transportation, a billboard, etc)
  • You are your child’s first and most important teacher.
  • Encourage and affirm parents/guardians in their roles as children's first and most important teacher, but without creating undue pressure. Families should recognize the intrinsic educational worth of their home experience but should not worry about trying to re-create a classroom experience or take on the role of a classroom teacher.
  • Remind families that their language practices in the home are rich and worthy. All opportunities to use, make meaning through, and play with language -- ANY language --are valuable to students’ cognitive growth and language development.

- Have families submit pictures or videos of completed activities. Use these pictures/videos to showcase and feature the families on a regular basis. This celebration will encourage increased participation and mitigates social isolation experienced by children and families; these social interactions are critical for development.
Preliminary Recommendation #4: Develop and implement short- and long-term technology plans to promote equitable online learning opportunities for low-income immigrant communities.
Ideas for Practice and Potential Areas of Investment

- Establish a long-term vision for technological access. Districts should view this as an opportunity to conduct a needs assessment regarding digital access, with specific attention to vulnerable populations.

- Provide students and families with access to Wi-Fi hot spots (e.g. using buses as mobile hotspots or providing families with downloadable material on flash drives.)

- Prioritize providing support for linguistically diverse families on when and how to use devices and learning platforms (e.g. create student- and family-centered help desks to help troubleshoot concerns). This could be facilitated through a relationship with the local public library.
Ideas for Practice and Potential Areas of Investment Cont’d

- Multilingual Learners should be provided with opportunities to utilize their home language within digital learning whenever possible. School districts should leverage the expertise of English Learner educators to select optimal tools to use and products that are specifically designed to build both language and academic content learning for ELs.

  • Practice examples:
  • Free educational videos can help ELs understand complicated concepts using interactive visuals.
  • E-readers allow ELs to pause and look up unfamiliar words while reading.
  • Project collaboration tools and discussion boards challenge older ELs to work with peers on projects in ways that strengthen their communication and collaboration skills.
  • Presentation and publication tools help ELs demonstrate what they have learned through a combination of text, music, images, and video.

- Prioritize the use of media platforms to meet the socio-emotional needs of students. Ideas include the creation of a zoom parade to make up for lack of contact; zoom meetings with classes were critical social time for students). Foster opportunities for students to meet virtually; pair ELs of the same language background for authentic conversations.
For Further Information, please contact:

REBECCA VONDERLACK-NAVARRO, MANAGER OF EDUCATION POLICY & RESEARCH
rvnavarro@latinopolicyforum.org
facebook: Latino Policy Forum twitter: @latinopolicy

https://www.latinopolicyforum.org