

National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE)
Recommendations to the US Department of Education on addressing the needs of English Learners

MAY 27, 2014

English Learners Round Table Discussion with Secretary Arne Duncan, Deputy Assistant Secretary and Director of OELA Libia Gil, members of the White House Education Initiative and highly influential leaders representing National Organizations that supports the success of all students and in particular English Learners, met for a 3-hour session with the Secretary and presented several positions and recommendations.

1. One of the current challenges to support ELLs is that the professional organizations related to math and science education are only minimally addressing strategies, accommodations, and adaptations in their curriculum and teacher preparation for teaching according to ELLs English proficiency levels. Therefore, ELLs are having limited opportunities to be prepared for and choose STEM related careers.
2. To elevate the national focus and integrate ELLs in all education efforts is to require that ELLs are consider as a group of students and their academic and language needs rather than focusing only on the general student population. For example, a requirement to include ELLs instruction and assessment based on their language proficiency is crucial for providing access to the curriculum to these students as required by OCR and as a social responsibility. Most definitely stop the marginalization and deficit-based identification and discussion (Pobrecito) syndrome of English Learners.
3. Policies are needed that require modified and adapted curricula related to college and career readiness, opportunities for the students to be exposed to careers and college life through programs like shadowing and visits to college campuses. That schools and districts work closer with community colleges and universities to provide dual credit for ELLs using courses with modified curricula, to articulate curricula, and to facilitate the transfer of students from one IHL to another.
4. Above all, the Title VII Fellowship must be fully re-established to build a sorely needed administrative leadership pipeline beginning at the school site up through the K-12 superintendency and College and University administration.
5. ELL students are the fastest growing segment of the school population.
6. ELL students are the most educationally needy segment of the school population; they are disproportionately poor, minority, and attend highly segregated schools which are disproportionately under-resourced. They reflect the entire spectrum of students – some are Gifted and Talented, some are disabled, some are homeless, and many are migrant.
7. ELL students bring to school knowledge, skills and abilities which they have learned at home in a language other than English. These knowledge, skills and abilities are the foundation for future learning.

8. Because most U.S. teachers and administrators are monolingual English speakers, they are unable to understand what ELL students know, and are unable to communicate with many ELL parents. Further, because they have not been trained on how to instruct non-English-language-background students, they are unable to build on their knowledge and to extend it.

9. Most American teachers are unprepared to teach ELL students, and they admit it when they are asked through polls.

10. As the Center for American Progress reported in 2012, all American teachers should be trained in effective instructional methods and techniques for ELL students.

11. Virtually none of the additional monies appropriated for education during the Obama Administration has been targeted on ELL students, their unique educational needs, and building the capacity of schools to meet those needs. Today, even though the population of students who are ELL and have IEPs are essentially equal, the amount of funding for special education is more than sixteen times greater than the level of funding for NCLB Title III.

12. The Administration should transform the ELL educational paradigm from remediation to enrichment, emphasizing the development of bilingual, bi-literate high school graduates and thus supporting a National Seal of Biliteracy Proficiency for high school graduates.

13. The Administration, through Executive Action, should pull resources from relevant Departments and agencies (e.g., DOL, HHS, State, HUD) to fund training programs specifically focused on ELL populations that span the spectrum of jobs from parent aides and paraprofessionals to teachers to PhDs. Particularly in the re-establishment of the Title VII Fellowship Program.

14. The Education Department should make it a priority to advance the vision that Senator Obama articulated in Thornton, Colorado during his 2008 campaign: "I believe that every American should be bilingual or trilingual." To advance the President's vision, USED should use its connections to U.S. corporations, foundations, educational organizations and the media to the transformed EL paradigm as noted in 8 above.

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On Behalf of NABE Executive Board
May 27, 2014