

AMSD Position on Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Funding

The Association of Metropolitan School Districts believes the five year limit on eligibility for Limited English Proficiency funding should be repealed and the formula should be enhanced to provide school districts with the resources needed to ensure that English language learners are able to achieve State and Federal standards.

BACKGROUND

Minnesota defines an LEP learner as:

- A student whose primary language is not English;
- A student whose English language skills do not allow for full classroom participation;
- A student whose prior year score on the TEAE test is below the cutoff score; and
- A student who is enrolled in an LEP educational program, but has not been enrolled in Minnesota public schools for five or more years. (MN Stat. § 124D.59)

According to the Department of Education 2005 fall population reports there were 57,665 students who are eligible for Limited English Proficiency services – an increase of over 110% in eight years. Over 34,000 of these students attended school in an AMSD school district.

The 2003 Legislature initiated the following changes in how Limited English Proficiency (LEP) funding is calculated for school districts:

- Limits were imposed on student eligibility.
 - Under the old law a student was eligible until they were able to pass a cut off score on the Test of Emerging Academic English.
 - Under the new law, eligibility is limited to students who have generated fewer than five years of average daily membership and are served in a program for LEP students during the current fiscal year.
- The method for counting LEP students was changed from a headcount system to an average daily membership system.
 - For program purposes, a clarification was made that an LEP learner is a student who has a home language other than English and is determined to lack the necessary English skills to participate fully in classes taught in English.
 - Beginning in FY 2004, the basic LEP revenue allowance was increased from \$584 to \$700 per eligible LEP student. The revenue

allowance for LEP concentration revenue was also increased from \$190 to \$250 per eligible LEP student. The allowance remained frozen in FY05, FY06 and FY07.

- The Department of Education estimates that the five-year limitation will reduce LEP funding to schools by \$10.8 million during the 2004-05 biennium.

RESEARCH

Research has shown it can take anywhere from seven to 10 years for English language learners to reach academic proficiency in English depending on their age, prior level of academic instruction, support systems and prior knowledge of English.

In one of the most extensive studies of LEP students to date, Dr. Virginia Collier and Dr. Wayne Thomas of George Mason University found that the long-term benefits of bilingual education only occur when students have access to bilingual education for a minimum of four to seven years.¹ Collier and Thomas conclude that students in short-term programs had significantly lower levels of achievement compared to students in longer programs. In fact, their study finds little difference in achievement between LEP students in short term bilingual programs and students forced to take English-only courses. Collier and Thomas' findings suggest that the current five-year limit on LEP funding is inappropriate and potentially harmful to Minnesota's LEP students.



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¹ Dr. Virginia Collier and Dr. Wayne Thomas, *A National Study of School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students' Long-Term Academic Achievement*. From 1985 to 2001, Collier and Thomas analyzed the academic records of more than 200,000 students in five different regions of the United States.