



## Association of Metropolitan School Districts

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# Position on English Learner Funding

**The Association of Metropolitan School Districts supports full funding for the English learner program to ensure that English learners have the opportunities and resources necessary to achieve State and Federal standards.**

## AMSD BELIEVES

- The state English learner funding formula should reflect the resources needed to prepare students to achieve state and federal standards and create the World's Best Workforce.
- Additional funding for staff training and student supports is needed to meet the goals and accountability requirements established in the state's Every Student Succeeds Act state plan.

state requires that language assistance services must be available and accessible to all families and the general public.

According to MDE, Minnesota's English learner population has increased almost 200 percent over the last 20 years. The MDE's latest special population report showed that 80,186 students were eligible for English learner services in the 2022-23 school year (an increase of nearly 3,000 students). More than 60 percent of these students attended school in an AMSD member school district with several districts having more than 20 percent of their students eligible for English learner services, including Richfield, Burnsville, Columbia Heights, St. Cloud and Saint Paul Public Schools.

## BACKGROUND

An English learner is defined in Minnesota under 2017 Minnesota Statutes, section 124D. 59, subdivision 2 as "a pupil in kindergarten through grade 12 or a PreK student who meets the following requirements:

1. the pupil, as declared by a parent or guardian uses a language other than English; and
2. the pupil is determined by a valid assessment measuring the pupil's English language proficiency and by developmentally appropriate measures, which might include observations, teacher judgment, parent recommendations, or developmentally appropriate assessments, to lack the necessary English skills to participate fully in academic classes taught in English."

As defined by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), language access is a guaranteed civil right, with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Executive Order 13166 requiring all recipients of federal funds to have a language access plan that explains their values and process for effectively communicating with individuals who speak a language other than English. As a result, the

According to MDE's English Learners in Minnesota 2020-21 Report<sup>1</sup>, 334 different home languages were identified being spoken in Minnesota school communities, with nearly 10 percent of students identified as English Learners. Nearly 250 estimated languages are spoken in AMSD districts, including 90 different languages in Minneapolis Public Schools, and more than 125 languages and dialects in Saint Paul Public Schools. In some schools and districts, English learners may comprise a majority of the student population. Of the top 12 languages spoken in Minnesota communities, most English learners speak Spanish, Somali and Hmong.

English learners (EL) continue to be the fastest-growing student group in Minnesota and, as the chart on page 2 shows, has shown steady, consistent growth upward the last 20 years, and data from the most recent report at the Minnesota State Demographic Center indicates that in the 2018-19 school year, more than 16 percent of students came from a home where the primary language spoken was other than English.<sup>2</sup>

Beginning in the 2018-19 school year, English language proficiency is now included in federal accountability for schools and districts through the Minnesota Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan. Minnesota law requires that all teachers are prepared and developed throughout their career to support the language development of their

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students. The state plan includes a goal of having 85 percent of English learners making progress toward English language proficiency by the year 2025.

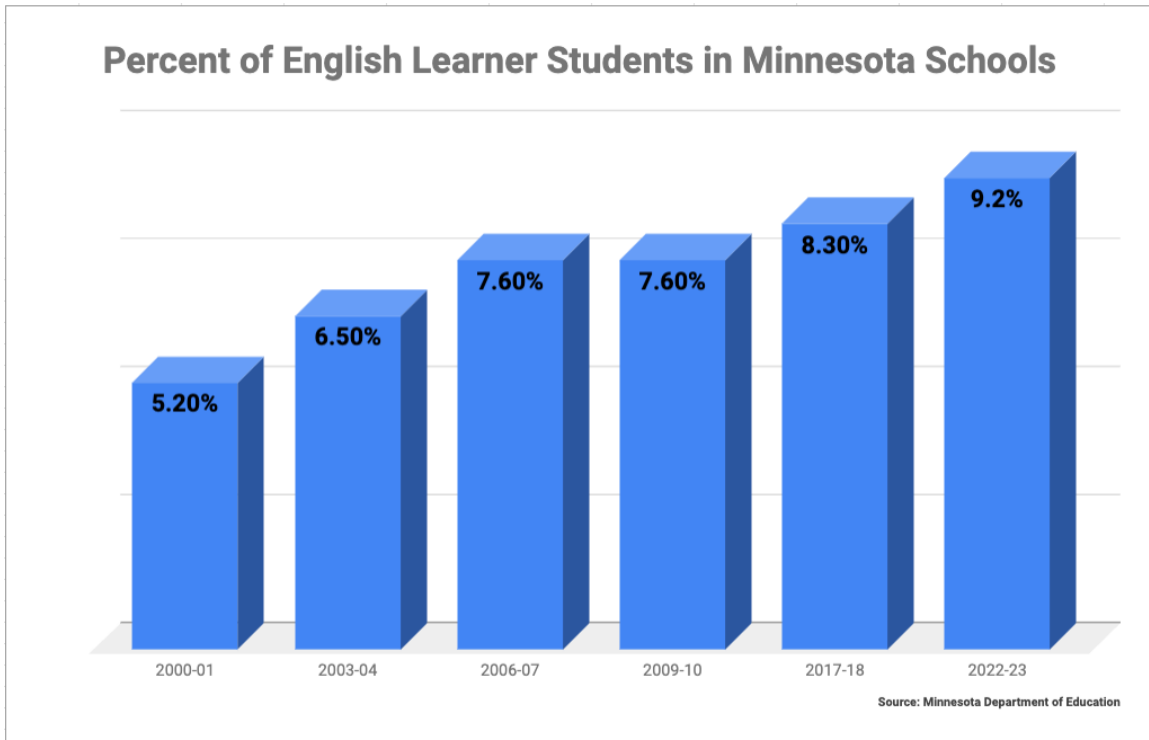
Research shows that high quality instruction within effective structures supported by comprehensive professional development is critical in educating English language learners.<sup>3</sup> Research also shows that students who have formal home language support, such as bilingual education, are able to sustain the gains in English, and to achieve even higher academic achievement than typical native-English-speakers.<sup>4</sup>

During the 2014 legislative session, lawmakers adopted English learner policy reforms in areas related to the World's Best Workforce, reading proficiency and teacher licensing and development. In addition, eligibility for English learner services was extended from 5 to 6 years. During the 2015 legislative session, eligibility for English learner services was extended from 6 to 7 years beginning in FY 2017. While the change in eligibility was a positive move, the program continues to be significantly underfunded.

In FY 21-22, AMSD school districts spent nearly \$145 million on services for English learners but received just \$34.6 million in English learner funding. In other words, AMSD districts redirected more than \$110 million in general education revenue to provide services to English learners.

The 2023 Education Bill included significant investment in the English Learner program. The English learning basic formula was increased from \$704 to \$1,228 per qualifying EL student for FY 24-26 and \$1,775 per qualifying EL student for FY 27 and later. The EL concentration formula was increased from \$250 to \$436 per qualifying EL student for FY 24-26 and \$630 per EL student for FY and later. In addition, a new component of EL revenue was established to cover 25 percent of the difference of a school district's spending and its revenue effective in FY 2027 and later.

Still, a funding gap will remain, with districts needing to divert general fund dollars to cover the difference. Fully funding the English learner program will help provide the support our students need to succeed.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> "English Learners in Minnesota: 2020-21 Report" Minnesota Department of Education, Available at: <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/el/>

<sup>2</sup> 2017-2018 Primary Home Language Totals." Data Reports and Analytics. Minnesota Department of Education, Available at: <http://w20.education.state.mn.us/MDEAnalytics/Data.jsp>; Minneapolis: <http://multilingual.mpls.k12.mn.us/demographics> and St. Paul: <https://www.spps.org/aboutus>

<sup>3</sup> Margarita Calderón, Robert Slavin and Marta Sánchez, "Effective Instruction for English Learners," *The Future of Children* 21.1 (2011): 107, 118-119.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas, Wayne P., and Virginia Collier. "School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students. NCBE Resource Collection Series, No. 9." (1997)