



HISTORY OF ELL PROGRAMS IN SAINT PAUL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A Quarter-Century of Change, 1975-2000

Language minority students have always been present in Saint Paul Public Schools. Until 1975, however, they did not receive special instructional services from trained school staff. During the 1975-1976 school year, 60 Southeast Asian refugees were served in a special intensive English program called TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). This marked the beginning of special programs for English language learners in SPPS.

The ELL population grew slowly at first, and then exploded in the early 1980s when large numbers of Hmong refugees resettled in the Twin Cities area. Although the population has grown steadily during the past quarter of a century, it has more than tripled since 1985 causing a dramatic transformation of the student population of SPPS during the tenure of many teachers in the district.

Expanding and Fine-Tuning our Programs, 2000-present

In the late 1990s, ELL programs in SPPS began to move away from the “pull-out” model that had characterized ELL services in the past. While *pull-out* programs focus solely on developing students’ English language proficiency, *content-based* programs strive to promote students’ mastery of academic content while they become proficient in English as subject areas are integrated with language objectives. As David and Yvonne Freeman, both leading scholars in the areas of biliteracy and bilingual education, argue, “because people learn language as they use it, it is logical to have them learn English as they study meaningful content, rather than to have them study English language as a separate subject apart from meaningful content” (*ESL/EFL Teaching: Principles for Success*, p. 32).

As ELL programs moved from pull-out to instructional collaboration models, the TESOL classes that served newcomer students (levels 1 and 2) were transitioned to the Language Academy program. In the former model, TESOL classes were comprised only of English language learners taught by an ESL teacher, and curriculum was focused on English language development rather than on content areas such as math or science. ELL students in TESOL classes had few opportunities to interact with their mainstream peers, and did not always have access to the same school services (gym, library, etc.) as their fellow students. The implementation of the Language Academy model (1999-2000) aimed to address what the TESOL classes lacked. In Language Academy classrooms, students interact with both native English-speaking peers and fellow English language learners. Students develop English

proficiency through content areas, and are taught by both a licensed ESL teacher and a licensed content-area teacher. Most importantly, students are fully integrated into the school community.

The transition towards instructional collaboration is evident in many levels of ELL programs. General education and ELL teachers are working collaboratively to address the needs of students in the elementary and secondary schools in Saint Paul. The concept of teaching language through content has spread throughout the Saint Paul school district in all levels of ELL service and the focus has shifted to student achievement in language along with academics.

In addition to changing how our ELL services are delivered, the ELL Department has significantly expanded the district's dual language programs within the last five years. Five elementary schools now have a Spanish dual language program and one elementary school has the first Hmong dual language program in the nation. These dual language programs are successful in producing bilingual students who are bicultural and biliterate. Additionally, research has shown that students who are literate in their first language are more successful in attaining their second language. Students in the dual language programs have shown great success in becoming fluent in their native language and in English.

To complement our academic ELL programs, the ELL department has also developed cultural components and parent outreach efforts for our ELL students and families. In order to best support the language and academic achievements of ELL students, the ELL department has several professional development opportunities available for SPPS staff. Presentations are offered on languages, cultures, and histories of major ELL student populations. Resources and workshops for embedding Hmong, Latino, and Somali culture into the social studies curriculum are also offered annually. Parent Advisory Committees for the Hmong, Latino, and Somali families meet regularly and continue to grow. Parents can also participate in classes that teach basic English skills and how to navigate through the school system. All of these cultural and community components continue to grow and positively influence the experiences and achievements of students and parents.

Over the years, there have been many changes with our ELL programs but the ELL department has steadily aligned our programs and services to our core values represented in our mission.

- Language Proficiency

- Strong Foundations

- Community Engagement

- Collaborative Success