



INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

Over the past decade, urban school districts across the country have experienced dramatic growth in their schools' ELL populations. In fact, English language learners are the most rapidly growing population in U.S. schools. The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that by 2030, students who speak a language other than English at home will constitute 40 percent of the school-age population.

These rapidly changing demographics have posed significant challenges for educators at all levels of the system—district superintendents, building administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, custodians, nurses, and other staff have worked to overcome language and cultural barriers and to ensure that English language learners have the same opportunities as all other students.

In Saint Paul Public Schools, approximately 41% of the student population is comprised of English language learners (2008-09). In order to best serve our students who are learning English, we have implemented a number of programs tailored to students' varying language, cultural and social needs. According to recent test results, our programs are working—the Council of the Great City Schools' *Beating the Odds VI* report (2006) shows that SPPS has made among the best gains of Great City Schools districts in closing the ELL vs. non-ELL achievement gap. In the 2008-2009 school year, the achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs continued to remain steady.

English language learners have had many different levels of experiences with education, culture, and family. This means that the levels of challenges and differences in learning of ELLs vary greatly. Many ELLs are new to the United States, but many others are not; some can read and write in their first language, but others have had little or no formal education at all. Some children have spent the majority of their lives in refugee camps while others were born in the United States, but may live in a close-knit community where there may be very little exposure to English.

Because English language learners come from countless different backgrounds, it is difficult to predict how long it will take each ELL student to achieve social and academic proficiency in English. Depending on a student's previous education background, the effectiveness of the ESL program, and many other factors, it can take between 4-8 years, if not longer. Most experts on the subject agree that ELL students should remain in ESL programs as long as it is necessary, rather than for a predetermined amount of time. In Minnesota, funding is provided for ELL students for a maximum period of five years – however, in SPPS, we continue to provide service to students for as long as they need it.

Because this time frame varies from student to student, ELL instruction in SPPS focuses on the development of social language or Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and academic language or Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency

(CALP) so that students can participate successfully in mainstream classes. This is the focus of our departmental philosophy—Language Proficiency, Strong Foundations, Community Engagement, Collaborative Success, whereby we provide the language support and the content material necessary to achieve both BICS and CALP through engagement and collaboration from teachers, students, parents, and the community.

English language learners need long-term, ongoing support in order to develop the academic English proficiency necessary for high achievement. However, simply adopting one sort of programming does not guarantee that English language learners will thrive. Instead, schools and districts often adopt more than one program model in accordance with various student characteristics and available resources. The ELL programs in SPPS follow this concept and are varied and designed to meet the needs of our diverse ELL student population. Our programs are implemented based on grade level, changes in the student population, language, native language support, and instructional models. These programs are regularly evaluated and revised, as well as aligned with state standards (state ELL and language arts standards) and district practices and initiatives (Readers Workshop, Writers Workshop, Math Workshop, Disciplinary Literacy) in order to help all students succeed.