



Illinois English Learner Handbook

A Guide for School Board Members,
District Administrators, and Principals

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Executive Summary

This handbook is presented with the goal of achieving increased academic outcomes and the lifelong success of English Learners. It is designed to support school leaders who are working with students across the state speaking languages other than English. The handbook was created in collaboration with the Illinois Association of School Boards, Illinois Principal Association, Illinois Association of School Administrators and Latino Policy Forum. Along with extensive research and legal guidance, the handbook honors the voices of English Learner educators throughout the state who are providing examples of best practice each and every day.

Why the Handbook is Important

The road to high-quality post-secondary outcomes must be tailored to individual student groups. While a “majority-minority” student population has long been a reality in Chicago, 2011 marked the first time minority students were the majority in kindergarten, first, second and third grade classrooms across Illinois. Most students in this demographic shift come from immigrant families, have a range of native- and English-language proficiency and/or come from families who may be unfamiliar with how to navigate U.S. schools. Their educational experience serves as a critical conduit for how they will integrate into society. Educators’ preparedness to build on student linguistic and cultural strengths will have a major impact on the future of Illinois.



The handbook provides school leaders and teachers with recommendations and local insights for how to create welcoming environments that focus on: specialized language and academic development, research on the effectiveness of various instructional strategies, budgeting for equitable access to learning, and ways to recruit and retain qualified bilingual education teachers.

It is important to note that in the case of English Learners there are legal requirements grounded in research that must be adhered to for these students beginning in preschool until high school graduation. This handbook is designed to assist local communities in understanding the unique needs of English learners and how research-based best practice can inform the creation of a local vision that is equitable and supports all students.

What is in the Handbook and How to Use It

The handbook is comprehensive and tailored for multiple audiences. Sections can be read on their own and used as a local resource. School board members and lawmakers charged with drafting policy and appropriating resources may wish to develop their background knowledge on English Learners. Topics of interest might include:

- ▶ Trends in English Learner Demographics and Terminology
- ▶ Research-based Facts about English Learners
- ▶ Unique Needs and Expectations of English Learners

The handbook also offers district administrators, English Learner directors and school leaders a detailed overview of how a vision might be implemented, funded and monitored. The entire handbook might provide meaningful information for anyone in a decision-making role regarding educational programs. Issues pertinent to English Learner education:

- ▶ English Learner Personnel: Recruitment, Retention and Evaluation
- ▶ English Learners and Linguistically and Culturally Relevant Early Learning
- ▶ Research-Based Best-Practice Principals to Boost English Learner Achievement
- ▶ Creating a Local English Learner Educational Vision and Policy to Align to Best Practice Principals
- ▶ English Learner Requirements and Funding a Local District Shared Vision
- ▶ Accountability and Monitoring Former English Learners

Illinois' future will be bright if it can realign educational policies, practices, and accountability systems to better respond to the specific needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students. Educating English Learners to their highest potential continues to be a source of pride in many communities across Illinois. Ultimately, the success of English Learners strengthens society and the economic health of the United States.

