

EXPAND SUPPORT FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

The Community Legislative Action Team recommends extension of weighted English Language Learner (ELL) funding from five years to seven years per pupil, in accordance with evidence-based practice. Additional flexibility in funds and blending funds should also be considered to meet the diverse needs of ELL students and families.

Background

- English Language Learners (ELL) are the fastest growing group of students in the Des Moines Public School District, representing 21% of the student population.
- The District serves more than 6,900 ELL students, with 156 committed teachers and staff, at 50 different sites in the community.
- The diverse student population represents 106 different nations and speaks 200 different languages and dialects.
- Since 1990, the ELL population has grown by more than 700% while overall student population has remained stable.
- The ELL population in the Des Moines Public School District accounts for approximately 23% of the ELL student population statewide.
- Currently, Iowa school districts are provided ELL weighted funding (.39) for five years per student.

Why this is a good investment

- Better Prepares Students. Extending the length of eligible funding will increase the length of services provided to ELL students and help develop their proficiency in the English language so they can be successful in the educational setting.
- Promotes Evidenced-Based Practice. Evidence-based practice identifies seven years as the length of time needed to achieve academic English proficiency and acclimate students to the culture and educational environment.

Why this is urgent

- ELL students would benefit from additional time given the amount of learning required to achieve proficiency in a second language.
- The belief that children immersed in the English language will accelerate proficiency does not align with research.
- We believe that children benefit from learning in their primary language before a secondary language can be effectively taught. This process takes time.
- DMPS continues to enroll refugee students from around the world. The critical needs of these students, in addition to learning English, are multiple and resource intensive.
- The ELL student graduation rate in the state is 82.9%, compared with an overall graduation rate of 90.8%. Additional resources are necessary to close this gap.