

Memo on School Closures and ELs
March 26, 2020

This memo briefly outlines key concerns about COVID-19-related school closures for English Learners (ELs) and their families. It was compiled in response to an inquiry from a U.S. Senate staff member to the Migration Policy Institute's (MPI) National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy. The question regarded what concerns EL administrators have about EL and immigrant-background students—particularly related to the use of online learning—and potential resource needs in the mid- to long-term that might be addressed in future congressional spending bills.

Findings draw on a two-question survey sent to members of the National Association of English Learner Program Administrators (NAELPA); a conversation with Magda Chia of Stanford University, who works closely with state Title III directors through the Council of Chief State School Officers; and a virtual meeting with state immigration policy coalitions who partner with MPI. The NAELPA survey participants represented eight states and included six respondents from state agencies, nine from districts, and three from schools.

Concerns about EL and Immigrant-Background Children and Families

EL administrators and community advocates were consistent in expressing concern about distance and online learning with immigrant-background and EL students. Concerns included:

- Lack of access to technology (devices and the internet) and help with troubleshooting
- Inadequate opportunities for parents and families to engage children in learning activities, especially as many immigrant parents are in “essential” jobs
- Challenges parents and families face in supporting students’ independent learning, especially when families lack English proficiency, literacy, and/or technology skills
- An urgent need for professional development for teachers, including
 - helping teachers find and use resources (especially when they are only provided a list of websites with no curation or guidance)
 - training on instructional strategies to support concept comprehension and language development in a distance/online learning environment
- A need for training and support for administrators to conduct business remotely (e.g., organizing professional development and management of employees)

Additional concerns were raised around the following issues:

- Families lacking transportation options to go to food pickup sites; some sites are restricting pickup only to drive-thru, and therefore requiring a car
- Language access for parents and ensuring meaningful communication with families more generally
- Lack of appropriate online and distance learning resources, especially bilingual materials and materials that integrate language and content learning
- Lack of access to critical socioemotional services provided by schools

We heard several concerns about screening and exiting ELs; we understand guidance is being prepared by the U.S. Department of Education and will be released shortly.

Also note that the [concerns raised by Secretary DeVos](#) about schools not providing services to any students over fears they cannot accommodate students with disabilities are also being raised relative to ELs, as schools are fearful of running afoul of ELs' civil rights. Guidance from the Office of Civil Rights on how possible violations during this period may be addressed would be helpful.

Suggestions for Funding

Participants in the NAELPA survey also provided suggestions for what they would like to see in a supplemental funding bill that would address ELs' mid- to long-term needs. Funding should provide for:

- Summer and afterschool learning, with an assurance that funds will be targeted to ELs and that schools will employ educators with expertise in teaching ELs to deliver such programs
 - Summer school and tutoring in content areas
 - Language enrichment camps
 - Transportation for summer and afterschool programs
- Technology needs
 - Development of accessible distance learning programs for ELs
 - Development of bilingual online learning resources (especially in the content areas)
 - Licenses for language learning software (e.g., Rosetta Stone)
 - Laptops, Chromebooks, or tablets for students to take home
 - Home internet access, especially in rural areas
 - Funding to improve school technology infrastructure (e.g., servers, training for staff, hiring technicians/managers)
- Curriculum and instruction
 - Paid time for curriculum redevelopment to adapt instruction for 2020-21
 - Funding for academic interventions, including learning materials and specialist teachers (funding positions during the summer and extra staff for next school year)
 - Professional development on topics such as trauma-informed teaching and distance learning for ELs
- Family literacy and family engagement, including technology literacy for adults
- Free meals in the summer
- Books to send home with students (including over the summer)

MPI also recommends that appropriate funding opportunities be open to community-based organizations such as refugee and immigrant service providers. Many such organizations already provide summer and afterschool enrichment, family literacy and family engagement, and language access, and could expand their reach with new or additional funding.

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