

Supporting Providers of English Language Learning (SPELL) Act

Sponsored by Reps. Jim Langevin, Adriano Espaillat

Supported by: Joint National Council for Languages-National Council for Languages and International Studies, TESOL International Association, California Association for Bilingual Education

English Learner Teacher Crisis

Approximately 5 million students, or **10 percent of all public-school students, are English learners**^[1] (ELs) whose native language is one other than English. Teaching these students requires a specific skillset and unique teaching strategies, including bilingual instruction. However, the Department of Education reports that **32 states have a shortage of teachers for EL students**, including English as a Second Language and Bilingual/Dual-language teachers, making them unable to meet students' needs and resulting in a discouraging academic achievement gap for this growing population.

According to the Economic Policy Institute, **“A shortage of teachers harms students, teachers, and the public education system as a whole.** Lack of sufficient, qualified teachers and staff instability threaten students' ability to learn and reduce teachers' effectiveness, and high teacher turnover consumes economic resources that could be better deployed elsewhere... In addition, the fact that the shortage is distributed so unevenly among students of different socioeconomic backgrounds challenges the U.S. education system's goal of providing a sound education equitably to all children.”^[2] The shortage is even worse when teacher certifications are taken into account, with many states turning to uncertified teachers to fill the gaps, and high-poverty and high-minority settings bearing the brunt of the shortage.

Teacher Loan Forgiveness Works

The cost of high-quality teacher preparation programs can be an obstacle to entering the teaching profession, but research shows an association between teachers' preparation level and their teaching effectiveness and retention. Fortunately, there is a solution. According to the Learning Policy Institute, **“Research has found that effective service scholarship and loan forgiveness programs leverage greater recruitment into professional fields and locations where individuals are needed and support retention.”**^[3]

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Currently, if a highly-qualified^[4] teacher has been employed for five consecutive school years in a high-need elementary or secondary school^[5], he or she is eligible for up to \$5,000 of student loan forgiveness. However, a math, science, or special education teacher who meets these requirements is eligible for up to \$17,500 of student loan forgiveness^[6]. Historically, math, science, and special education teachers have been in highest demand, so this additional incentive makes sense.

Today, EL teachers join them at the top of the teacher shortage subject list^[7]. To address this trend, the **bill would add English language teachers to this category, making them eligible for up to \$17,500 in student loan forgiveness as well.** By adding this incentive and assisting highly-qualified EL teachers in repaying their student loans, we can tackle the EL teacher shortage and ensure our nation's ELs have the opportunity to succeed.

For more information or to cosponsor the legislation, please contact Kerry McKittrick with Congressman Langevin at 202-225-2735 or kerry.mckittrick@mail.house.gov.

^[1] Defined in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 [20 USC 7801]

^[2] Economic Policy Institute, “The teacher shortage is real, large and growing, and worse than we thought” (March 2019).

^[3] Learning Policy Institute, “Taking the long view: State efforts to solve teacher shortages by strengthening the profession” (2018).

^[4] Defined in 20 USC 7801

^[5] Defined in 20 U.S.C. 1087ee(a)(2)(A)

^[6] Public Law No: 108-409

^[7] Learning Policy Institute, “A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher supply, demand, and shortages in the U.S.” (2016).