

AOE Follow Up Questions-ELs and Pupil Weighting Study

Testimony to: Senate Education Committee
Respectfully Submitted by: Anne Bordonaro, Director, Federal & Education and Support Programs
Date: January 27, 2022
Re: Follow-up to questions from 1/14/22 testimony

How many additional staff positions would AOE need to effectively support schools and LEAs in appropriately and effectively instructing their EL students, especially Vermont's rural schools with the fewest numbers of EL students?

The Agency would need one additional permanent full-time position to focus on: Title III grant administration; technical assistance in meeting EL instructional and other requirements, particularly for LEAs with few ELs who rely more heavily on the Agency for support; outreach/collaboration with non-profit organizations working with refugees/ELs; and EL assessment and instructional policy development. The current EL position would be reframed to focus on EL assessment management, data collection and reporting responsibilities, which currently dominate the time of the one EL position.

What mechanisms does the Agency have to ensure that categorical aid would be spent more directly as intended on ELs than funds appropriated via the current weighting formula?

There are two primary mechanisms to promote accountability for fund use.

The most restrictive approach is to operate categorical aid for ELs as a state reimbursement grant program. This would ensure that funds are spent on EL programming but would be cumbersome for the AOE and the LEAs. Running aid as a grant program would require SEA development of an e-application process, annual application and amendment development and review by the LEA and SEA, reimbursement submission and processing by the LEA and SEA, and monitoring by the SEA. In addition, unused funds would likely need to be forfeited or reallocated to other LEAs. In general, the

Agency does not favor creation of new grant programs because of the work involved for LEAs and the Agency. That is particularly the case in contexts such as this where many of the grants would be very small. If the legislature does go this route, additional staffing to stand up and administer this grant program would be required.

A less restrictive approach would be to mandate consistent coding of all EL expenses in the Uniform Chart of Accounts (UCOA) which already has a code for EL. The AOE could provide additional guidance to LEAs on what expenses should be coded to this code. Reports could then be generated retrospectively by AOE to compare an LEA's EL allocation to its expenditures for EL. But a decision would need to be made by the legislature regarding what to do if an LEA underspends its allocation.

Is there a statewide EL curriculum?

The Agency is committed to ELs having access to the full "regular" curriculum. The Agency does not have a separate statewide EL curriculum, just as we do not have statewide curricula in other content areas. We are part of WIDA, a multi-state consortium based at the University of Wisconsin and dedicated to EL assessment, language instruction, and professional education. We have adopted the WIDA EL standards which are intended to be used to develop EL curriculum.

The Agency would direct educators seeking curriculum guidance to the WIDA portal and to appropriate peers in other districts. VT educators have access to the professional learning courses, workshops, and materials offered by WIDA at no cost. There is a facilitated workshop on standards-based EL curriculum development available through WIDA. In addition, the AOE's EL Coordinator frequently offered a workshop on standards based EL curricular development each spring, and we anticipate this will continue when the new Coordinator is hired.

Do we have any other state requirements re: EL education, such as EL instructional methods?

Vermont does not have any state laws or regulations related to EL education other than SBE rule 9500 which specifies how to define an English language learner for reporting purposes, and which needs to be revised because it is outdated.

Some states prescribe particular EL instructional approaches such as bilingual or sheltered instruction, or certain hours of instruction, or proscribe particular approaches; VT does not do either. In Vermont, instructional approaches and intensity and duration of instruction are meant to be related to the needs of the individual students being served.

In a related vein, VT has invested in the Seal of Biliteracy program to promote, encourage, and recognize the value of bilingualism, regardless of one's first language. See <https://sealofbiliteracy.org/>.

For more information on curricular questions, please contact Jess DeCarolis, Division Director of Student Pathways.

How many EL licensure and/or endorsement programs do we have in VT? What other options currently exist for EL endorsement in the short term (ex. transcript review, peer review, etc.)?

VT currently has one fully approved licensure program in EL at St. Michael's College. Additionally, UVM has a series of courses that one may take to add an EL endorsement to an existing license through transcript review, and they currently are pursuing ROPA review for this sequence to become an approved program.

Educators also may always put together the required coursework on their own to add the EL endorsement through transcript review if they already hold licensure or may pursue licensure or additional endorsement through Peer Review.

Licensed EL teachers must devote a portion of their relicensure work to improving their practice in their content area, which is EL instruction. VT does not, however, prescribe any particular EL content work for relicensure of other educators. Professional learning for relicensure is individualized based on the educator's licensure area and their self-identified learning needs. Individual LEAs could prescribe and/or promote particular professional learning for their educators, such as adaptation of instruction for ELs, based on determination of their local needs.

For more information on licensure questions, please contact Patrick Halladay, Division Director of Education Quality.

What kinds of new state requirements or supports might enhance EL learning opportunities in VT?

Greater skills and knowledge among classroom teachers (content teachers, elementary classroom teachers, special educators, etc.) pertaining to how to adapt instruction for English learners is sorely needed. In addition, greater skills, and knowledge among all educators regarding how to welcome and support the families of EL students in a meaningful way is needed. Both could be addressed via identification of additional training opportunities in the EL standards and how they should be applied to "regular" instruction and effective parent engagement strategies.

Vermont has just recently agreed to participate in the New England cohort of a project dedicated to enhancement of the skills and knowledge of all educators in addressing the needs of EL learners. It is too early to tell whether this project will yield useful resources and professional learning opportunities for Vermont educators. For more information, see <https://www.excelleadershipacademy.org/>.

The Agency is not, however, in favor of mandating certain coursework or professional learning for every educator for a variety of reasons. *For more information on this matter, please contact Patrick Halladay, Division Director of Education Quality.*