



Transforming Districts, Schools and Classrooms  
in New York State  
by prioritizing Equity and Academic Success for  
Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners

A SYNTHESIS REPORT

August 2019



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# Introduction

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In spring 2014, New York State Education Department (NYSED) adopted the [Blueprint for English Language Learner/Multilingual Learner Success](#) as a new approach to ensure that Multilingual Learners/English Language Learners (MLLs/ELLs) attain the highest levels of academic success and language proficiency. Working to ensure that all students are ready for college, career, and civic readiness, the Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages (OBEWL) implemented a comprehensive set of capacity building efforts to implement BOR policies. These all share the common goal of supporting the individual educational paths and ~~social~~ needs of all MLLs/ELLs, undergirded by the belief that ~~all~~ teachers are teachers of MLLs/ELLs.

These changes define a new era in the state's educational history for MLLs/ELLs, transforming how students are learning English as a new language ~~and~~ developing their understanding of language(s) in their academic classes. This approach focuses learning ~~centered~~ on practices of critical thinking and problem solving through an integrated model of English as a Second Language (ENL), key shifts toward culturally responsive and sustaining education, and the development of more robust resources such as those ~~for~~ [Students with Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education](#) (SIFE) and [Emergent Multilingual Learners](#) (EMLLs) in prekindergarten. Underlying this new approach has been a significant investment in capacity building through aligned collaborations with educators, families and community-based organizations (CBOs), and a shift towards a growth model using student performance data on [New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test](#) (NYSESLAT).

These efforts have resulted in ~~modest~~ improvements in student achievement and graduation rates combined with a decline in the dropout rate. [http://www.nysed.gov/office/office-of-bilingual-education/Link-164-MCID-18-c](#)

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### Figure 1. Fast Facts: Who are New York's MLL/ELLs?

- x Of the approximately 2.6 million public school students in New York in 2017-18, 9.8% were MLLs/ELLs, representing over 240,000 students statewide. Students who communicate in Spanish (64.8%) and Chinese (8.9%) constitute about three fourths of the State's MLL/ELL population
- x The State's MLL/ELL population is diverse. Students include Newcomer MLLs/ELLs (48%), Developing MLLs/ELLs (33.7%), Long-term MLLs/ELLs (18.3%), MLLs/ELLs with Disabilities (22.1%), and Former MLLs/ELLs (8.8%).
- x As of 2017-18, the top ten languages spoken by NYS MLLs/ELLs are Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Bengali, Russian, ~~Portuguese~~, Urdu, French, Karen, and Uzbek.
- x Students with Inconsistent/Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE) make up of 3% of the total MLL/ELL population in 2017-18.

(Source: NYSEDORS 2017-18 SY)

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# The Rationale

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The visionary reform efforts for MLLs/ELLs have been a long time coming. In Spring of 2014, NYSED released the [Blueprint for English Language Learner Success](#) that affirms and elevating expectations for administrators, policymakers, and practitioners to prepare MLLs/ELLs for success beginning in prekindergarten, and to lay their foundation for college and career readiness.

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# Taking Stock

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This is a particularly important time to evaluate the progress NYS has made in educating its MLL/ELL population, as in the past decade the nation's students from kindergarten to college have continued to grow in linguistic and cultural diversity ([NCES, 2019](#)). Educators, policymakers, researchers, and community and family members have come together as never before determined to improve the learning outcomes of MLLs/ELLs within the public educational system.

This synthesis report looks back at what has been accomplished and the challenges still to be addressed by NYSED. What follows is a summary review of the key policies and practices implemented since the release of the Blueprint, accompanied by an examination of outcomes for MLLs/ELLs during this period.

## Aligning a Cohesive Set of State Policies to Meet the Blueprint's Vision

In order to support the vision of the Blueprint, NYSED has instituted a cohesive system of more equitable policies, regulations, and practices that are tailored to the educational needs of MLLs/ELLs. These allow resources to be directed to students, teachers, school and district leaders as well as to families, guiding how MLLs/ELLs learn throughout the school day, increasing the capacities of educators within the system, and engaging families as a part of their child's educational development.

In particular, Part 154 of the Commissioner's Regulations (CR 154) (along with the NYS E Student Succeeds Act Plan) has played an influential role in shaping how MLLs/ELLs are now educated and assessed in New York State. In addition, the NYS Seal of Biliteracy for high school graduates (adopted in 2016) signals a formal recognition of those students who have achieved high levels of proficiency in English and at least one other language and builds on the rich linguistic and cultural assets of the high school graduates of NYS. Furthermore, early learning programming for EMLLs has been strengthened to include guidance and support for prekindergarten programs in implementing best practices relative to students' home language(s). Most recently, a World Language Leadership Team has been working closely with stakeholder groups in revising the World Language Standards and building capacity through organized professional learning opportunities so that MLLs/ELLs can better meet the demands of 21st century learning.

NYSED expanded its enforcement work by requesting and created an attorney position to exclusively work on the enforcement of Commissioner's Regulation Part 154 (CR Part 154) and ensure MLLs'/ELLs' educational rights—and that of immigrant students more generally—are protected. To support these efforts, the Department hired additional OBEWL staff by

expanding the capacity of the OBEWL team to oversee the implementation of Part 154 and provide ongoing guidance and support to the field.

### **Commissioner's Regulations Part 154**

In December 2011, the NYS Board of Regents under the direction of Assistant Commissioner Ira Schwartz directed NYSED staff to engage the field to determine how CR 154 regulations that specify the requirements for provision of education to MLLs/ELLs in New York State and that had not been significantly amended in 30 years could be updated to better serve the needs of the state's growing MLL/ELL population. Over the past decade, the State's MLL/ELL enrollment (spanning all geographic regions throughout the state) had increased by 20%, surging to over 240,000 students who made up just under 10% of the total public student population. NYS has also grown significantly in its linguistic diversity during this time, with over 200 languages spoken by students.

Finalized under the leadership of Deputy Commissioner Angélica Infante and Assistant Commissioner Lissette Collins and approved by the Board of Regents in 2014, key changes in CR 154 now guide all aspects of MLL/ELL programming. Identifying touchstones toward fulfilling each of the eight Blueprint principles. Key areas of work include MLL/ELL identification processes, design of bilingual programs, and practices that support the implementation of a co-teaching Integrated ENL model.

Prior to the changes in CR 154, MLLs/ELLs had been pulled out from heterogeneous classrooms and separated in ENL courses, depriving students of contact and interactions with their native English-speaking peers (and other MLLs/ELLs on their way to English mastery). As a result, students were provided with a more narrowly restricted education in which grammar and vocabulary rather than academic content were the focus (Aldés, 2001). Recognizing that MLLs/ELLs cannot effectively be taught language in isolation from content, the guidance from the Blueprint aims to provide students with more rigorous opportunities that support students in learning grade level material while providing them the English language skills needed to access that information.

Central to these changes have been enhancements designed to make certain that regardless of



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school communities (superintendents, principals, school leaders, teachers, etc.) track student

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[21st Century](#) (November 6, 2018, Saratoga Springs) and [NYS World Language Global Design for Proficiency](#) (June 6, 2019, Queens College, CUNY).

## Taking a Long View in Capacity Building Effort

In order to build a robust system of educators and system leaders who can support the academic successes of MLLs/ELLs, OBEWL has allocated funding and resources to support professional learning across the continuum of stakeholders within the system. This includes expanding the number of qualified ESOL and bilingual educators, addressing the teacher shortage in NYS, increasing the leadership and instructional capacities of school, district, and regional leaders, building an infrastructure of family and community supports so that parents and community-based partners can contribute to the academic and life success of MLLs/ELLs.

## Building a Robust Pipeline of Bilingual Educators through Clinically Intensive Teacher Institutes (CRITIs)

[CRITI programs](#) may prepare up to twenty candidates per year with graduate level coursework leading to certification in English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Bilingual Education (BE) Extension. NYSED currently has established partnerships with sixteen Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs) to prepare teachers and leaders of MLLs/ELLs with coursework and training necessary for certification in either ESOL or BE. Through the use of state funded grants, tuition for teachers in the CRITI programs is subsidized and coursework is offered in an accelerated format. Since 2014, close to 50 teachers participating in these CRITI programs have completed coursework necessary for certification in either ESOL or a BE Extension. OBEWL continues to work with IHEs to increase and sustain high quality CRITI programs across the state, therefore building



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# Assessing Impact

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Since the adoption of the Blueprint, NYSED has experienced steady progress toward higher levels of English language proficiency for MLLs/ELLs. In the three years since the CR 154 amendments have been implemented, NYS MLLs/ELLs are achieving English proficiency and exiting ELL status at higher rates than before (including over 20,000 students who have exited ELL status via the expansion of exit criteria outlined earlier).

The percentage of ELLs exiting with a score of Commanding on the NYSED SLAT has increased across all grade levels from 9.0% in 2015 to 13.8% in 2018.

- f* In elementary school, the percentage of MLLs/ELLs achieving Commanding levels of proficiency has increased from 9.8% in 2015 to 14.7% in 2018.
- f* In middle school, the percentage of MLLs/ELLs achieving Commanding levels of proficiency has increased from 13.2% in 2015 to 17.6% in 2018.
- f* In high school, the percentage of MLLs/ELLs achieving Commanding levels of proficiency has increased from 6.1% in 2015 to 9.9% in 2018.

Despite the promising increases in English language proficiency rates, much work is still needed to address the MLL/ELL graduation and dropout levels. According to NYSED 2018 high school graduation data (for the cohort entering 9th grade in 2014), the overall graduation rate was 80.4%, yet disconcerting achievement gaps exist for MLLs/ELLs, whose graduation rate was only 29.0% (though an increase from the 2013 cohort rate of 26.6%). At the same time, the 2018 dropout rate for the 2014 MLL/ELL cohort was 27.5%, an improvement of 2.2% compared to the previous year, it is still significantly higher than the overall dropout rate of 6.0%. ELLs in NYS (students identified as English language learners in any school year preceding the school year of their last enrollment) continue to outperform their grade level peers. In the 2014 cohort graduation rate data, Ever ELLs had a graduation rate of 58%. Ever ELLs show strong overall academic progress in ELA and surpassed the overall statewide graduation rate by more than five percentage points.

In addition, only 18.7% of MLLs/ELLs attained a Regents diploma, only a little over 1% attaining an Advanced Regents designation. A significant proportion (40.5%) of graduating MLLs/ELLs remain enrolled in hopes of graduating in their 5th or 6th year of high school.

The current outcomes are inequitable and unacceptable, and intensive efforts are needed to better serve MLLs/ELLs. BEWL remains committed to working with teachers, community

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nysed.gov/news/2019/state-education-department-releases-2014-cohort-high-school-graduation-rates>



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# Looking Ahead

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Like many other educational systems in the country, NYSED faces a critical juncture where the educational decisions made today will define the future for our students, our society, and our country. As detailed in a 2019 TESOL report, NYS efforts have been favorably received:

New York State endeavors to adequately support ELLs through access to participate in state assessments with appropriate accommodations, transparent accountability methods that specifically measure progress of ELLs, and motivation in holding teachers to rigorous standards for teaching English as a second language during preparation and through in service years (Broughton, Soto, & White, 2019, p. 63).

Building on these successes and closing the equity and achievement gap will require sustained attention to effectively implement the necessary practices, policies, and cultural shifts needed at the classroom, district, regional and state levels. While considerable progress has been made,



- o Provide additional support and resources that broaden the participation of MLLs/ELLs (and ensure equitable access to) CTE programs and activities (including the promotion of gender diversity in non-traditional career paths).

**f Revising the World Languages Standards**

- o Engage with the World Languages Leadership Team and stakeholder groups to revise new learning standards for World Languages (Languages Other than English), as well as create resources and professional learning opportunities to support teachers

**f Design resources to support MLLs/ELLS and the Next Generation Learning Standards**

- o Align the Bilingual Common Core Progressions with the Next Generation Learning Standards for English Language Arts in accordance with the [NYSED Next Generation Learning Standards Roadmap and Implementation Timeline](#)
- o Continue building the capacity of educators of MLLs/ELLs to scaffold the grade level acuitl.4 Td [ ( wi)2 (th)1 ( th)1 (e)5 ( N)-1 (e)5 (x)-1 ( t )10.1 (G)-2 (e)

# Highlighted Resources

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[Blueprint for Multilingual Learner/English Language Learner Success](#) (2014).

A statewide framework of eight guiding principles for administrators, policy makers, and practitioners to prepare MLLs/ELLs for success beginning in prekindergarten to lay the foundation for college, career, and civic readiness.

[Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework](#) (2019).

This framework is intended to help education stakeholders create student-centered learning environments that affirm cultural identities; foster positive academic outcomes; develop students' abilities to connect across lines of difference; elevate historically marginalized voices; empower students as agents of social change; and contribute to individual student engagement, learning, growth, and achievement through the cultivation of critical thinking.

[Emergent Multilingual Learners in Prekindergarten Programs](#) (2017).

Resources are intended to support the design of optimal learning environments that value linguistically diverse children who enter as early as Prekindergarten. Tools included best practices that help educators identify when a prekindergarten student's home or primary language is other than English, as well as instructional planning and programming guidance.

[A Guide to Community-Based Organizations for Immigrants](#) (2019).

This resource provides a list of organizations that may be useful to parents and communities. Organized by geographical regions, listed services include advocacy & community engagement, health care & insurance, housing, labor & employment, legal services & lawful status, public(an)-1 (t)-2 (s)

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[Multilingual Learner/English Language Learner Program Quality Review and Reflective Protocol Toolkit](#) (2019)

This toolkit is designed to provide teams of leaders in districts, Regional Bilingual Education Resource Networks (RBERNs) and school sites who are charged with assessing program quality. Included are suggested processes and resources as well as an MLL/ELL Program Quality Review Continuum for determining a school's current level of implementation of school-wide practices that support MLLs/ELLs towards graduation, college, career, and civic readiness.

[The New York State Seal of Biliteracy](#) (NYSSB) (2019)

NYSSB was established to recognize high school graduates who have attained a high level of proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in one or more languages, in addition to English.

[Parent' Bill of Rights](#) (2018).

The Parents' Bill of Rights summarizes critical rights concerning educational access and programming for MLLs/ELLs and their parents.

[Students with Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education Resources](#) (2019).

A set of tailored resources designed to support districts and schools in the education of Students with Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education (SIFE).

[Topic Briefs to Support Linguistically Diverse Learners for the NYS Next Generation P-12 Learning Standards](#) (2018).

A series of eight topic briefs developed by Dr. Nonie K. Lesaux and Dr. Emily Phillips Galloway for NYS that shift the traditional model of MLL/ELL instruction to one that serves MLLs/ELLs through high-quality, daily advanced literacy instruction, and builds language and communication skills for the 21st century.

For additional information and resources related to MLLs/ELLs please visit the [Office of Bilingual Education website](#).

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