



EPSL | **EDUCATION POLICY STUDIES LABORATORY**
Education Policy Research Unit

The Status of English Language Learners in Florida:

Trends and Prospects

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Executive Summary

One out of every five students in Florida's K-12 public schools is classified as an English Language Learner (ELL). While policy-makers increasingly use standardized testing, even as they debate the appropriate instructional methods for an ever-increasing population of non-native English speaking students, how will these students' educational rights be addressed? This brief examines how the state of Florida annually provides equal educational opportunities to almost 300,000 non-native English speaking students who have been identified through surveys and testing as Limited English Proficient (LEP). In particular, this brief examines the ongoing efforts of the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) to meet both the letter and spirit of the 1990 Consent Decree between the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the Florida Department of Education. The Consent Decree requires each LEP pupil to receive “equal access to programming which is appropriate to his or her level of English proficiency, academic achievement, and special needs.”

In the past several years, there has been a simultaneous increase in the number of English Language Learners and the accountability pressures placed upon schools at the local, state, and federal levels. To meet the needs of its English Language Learners, it is recommended that the state of Florida:

1. Increase funding for the Office of Multicultural Student Language Education (OMSLE).
2. Provide funding that would permit research organizations to conduct external evaluations, in order to allow closer monitoring of the Consent Decree's mandate to annually collect comparative data on English Language Learners and native English speakers.
3. Enhance teacher education programs at the in-service and pre-service levels by mandating that ESOL teachers be certified in the areas they teach, recruiting high quality (particularly minority) teachers, and removing exemptions for Consent Decree-mandated ESOL training of teachers.
4. Focus Resources on High School English Language Learners who are at risk for dropping out of school.

The foregoing is a summary of a policy brief in the report *Reform Florida* (Education Policy Research Unit, April 2004). The complete policy brief is available on the Education Policy Studies Laboratory (EPSL) website at:

<http://www.asu.edu/educ/epsl/EPRU/documents/EPSL-0401-113-EPRU.doc>

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