

Oregon needs English language learner reform (OPINION)



By Julia Meier, Carmen Rubio and Rev. Joseph Santos-Lyons

We were glad to see The Oregonian/OregonLive's coverage of students learning the English language ("[ESL progress talks the talk,](#)" Feb 21). However, we wanted to share points where we believe the article missed the mark, based on the realities experienced by many Oregon children who are learning English.

As an alliance of parents, community leaders and advocates for kids, we believe in an Oregon where all kids have access to quality education. We can't afford to leave one out of 10 students behind because they don't start school knowing English. Our future prosperity depends on them. That's why we join with legislators, educators, parents and

others in supporting significant changes in how our state serves English Language Learners (ELL) students.

Despite the few bright spots in districts covered in the article, data shows that our current ELL education system is broken for far too many of our children. We only manage to graduate 49 percent of our ELL students, and nearly a quarter (23 percent) of students have been in language development programs for more than five years.

We can't just say it's because a lack of resources; Oregon allocates the second highest dollar amount in the U.S. per ELL student. Not only that, we can't even say how the additional funding that districts receive for their ELLs are spent, because in an absence of clear standards each district is left to interpret ELL costs differently. In many cases, this has led to state ELL funds paying for all manner of education expenses.

Every day we hear from parents who don't understand why they aren't getting good information about their children's progress and from students who are left to languish in ELL study halls, often never exiting an ELL program -- even after spending 12 years in the program.

We know we can do better. In fact, data clearly shows that if we implement the right kinds of ELL programs and supports ELL students can often outperform their peers. The Oregon Alliance for Education Equity strongly supports legislation to improve our ELL system. A proposal is in the works that would bring statewide standards in accounting and transparency, help schools implement effective ELL programs and increase the urgency and focus on ELL students while also supporting Oregon's existing ELL statewide strategic plan.

We have educators and parents eager for change. We have strong support from leaders in our Legislature and school districts. And best yet, we have the children whose success represents our future prosperity. That's something everybody can get behind. •

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