

School districts struggle to find English language learner instructors

The number of students in New York whose primary language is not English grew by 44% from 2011-12 to 2017-18 in areas outside New York City.¹ School districts in New York are required to provide English as a New Language instruction to these students, since English acquisition is considered a core instructional area. But many districts are struggling to find teachers with the specialized skills to help these students learn the language.

A survey conducted by NYSSBA found that 52% of superintendents with non-native English speakers in their schools reported having difficulty recruiting and hiring teachers specifically trained to provide ENL instruction. One in five superintendents reported having a shortage of such teachers in the 2018-19 school year.² This report explores the extent of the challenge in New York, the causes and what school districts may do to address the problem.



New York's experience

NYSSBA's April 2019 survey found recruiting and hiring ENL teachers a challenge in every region of the state. Some areas – particularly rural ones – face greater challenges than others. For example, 63% of superintendents in the North Country (Area 6) said their district had difficulty recruiting and hiring ENL teachers, compared to only 26% of superintendents in Nassau County (Area 11).

Two main factors contribute to the shortage of ENL instructors. The first is an increase in the number of ELL students. Overall, ELL enrollment in New York increased 11% between 2011-12 and 2017-18, from 205,553 to 228,244. Outside of New York City, the increase was a whopping 44%, when ELL enrollment rose from 59,660 to 85,873. New York City's ELL enrollment actually decreased over that time period, but still comprises 62% of all ELL enrollment.³

The second is related to 2015 changes to New York's Part 154 Regulations. Prior to these changes, ENL support was almost exclusively a "pull-out" – or stand-alone – program. Students were taken out of the general education classroom to work in a small group setting in a separate room. Students in multiple grade levels and at different language proficiency levels could also be combined with few restrictions. Under the new regulations, only students in two contiguous grades may be combined in stand-alone classes.

Additionally, all ENL students now must receive ENL support in an integrated English and/or other core content area. This has made ENL instruction a "push-in" program, whereby an ENL teacher comes into the general education classroom to support English language learners during content-area lessons. This increased the needs of districts for certified ENL teachers.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

► ELL Enrollments Rise

The number of English language learner students in New York outside of New York City increased 44% from 2011-12 to 2017-18, according to data from the New York State Education Department (NYSED).

► ELL Enrollment Varies Geographically

The greatest increases were in the Upper Hudson region (89%), western (75%) and central (53%) New York and Long Island (52%), based on NYSED data.

► More Teachers Required

Recent changes to state regulations have increased the need for ENL teachers.

► Encouraging Signs

While the number of English language learner students in New York has grown, the number of ENL teachers has too.

► BOCES is one solution

Districts struggling to find certified teachers or those with low ELL enrollments can consider contracting with other organizations to offer required services.

¹ NYSSBA analysis of New York State Education Department data. New York State Education Department. Information and Reporting Services. Public School Enrollment. Retrieved from <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/statistics/enroll-n-staff/home.html>.

² The survey was conducted from April 8, 2019 to April 21, 2019. A total of 659 superintendents were invited to participate, and 240 responses were received – a rate of 36%.

³ NYSSBA analysis of New York State Education Department data. New York State Education Department. Information and Reporting Services. Public School Enrollment. Retrieved from <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/statistics/enroll-n-staff/home.html>.



“Most districts are still struggling to fully implement these new regulations due to the financial burden this placed on districts to add [teachers] to their budgets, even to serve the same number of students,” said Marisa Bel, K-12 Supervisor for World Languages & English as a New Language for Bethlehem Central School District in Albany County.⁴

“We currently do not have a shortage, but with retirements and the potential of not having one of our ENL teachers return next year, it is always a challenge to recruit and secure new staff,” said Mark Potter, superintendent of the Liverpool school district in Onondaga County.⁵

In addition to being difficult to recruit and hire, ENL teachers tend to be less experienced than other teachers. In 2017, for example, 24% of ENL teachers outside of New York City taught with either provisional (entry-level) certification or no certification at all. By comparison, only about 10% of math, reading and science teachers had provisional or no certification that year.⁷

Some districts with small English language learner populations contract with BOCES to provide ENL services rather than hire a full time teacher. **Erie 2 BOCES offers ENL instruction once a week** through a certified ENL teacher who provides one-on-one and/or group instruction to assist with common core curriculum in all subject areas.

According to the NYSSBA survey, about 13% of superintendents said they had no ELL students.

Encouraging signs

Although recruitment and retention is a challenge for many districts, there are some positive signs. While the number of English language learner students in New York has grown, the number of ENL teachers has too. Between 2011-12 and 2017-18, the number of ENL teachers outside of New York City increased by 49%. **In New York City, the increase was 69%.**

The regulations adopted by the State Education Department in 2015 may help explain the increase. The regulations allow content-area teachers to earn an add-on certification in TESOL (Teaching English to speakers of other languages) with 15 credit hours of instructional work. Schools with content-area teachers who have this certification are exempt from needing a designated ENL teacher.⁹

What's ahead

According to the U.S. Department of Education, enrollments for Hispanic students are **projected to increase** 16% between 2015 and 2027 nationally and by 21% for Asian/Pacific Islander students. This suggests the number of students requiring ENL services will continue to grow.

School districts will need to find creative solutions to meet the need for qualified ENL teachers. For example, providing incentives for teachers to earn additional state certificates could enable school districts to hire and reward teachers for dual-certification, and then assign these teachers to multiple roles when scheduling. Having a dually-certified English/ENL teacher could generate cost savings for the district by having them fill dual roles.

English Language Learner Enrollments

The U.S. Department of Education projects that nationally enrollments for Hispanic students will increase by 16% and by 21% for Asian/Pacific Islander students by the year 2027. This suggests the number of students requiring ENL services will continue to grow in the years to come.

Rural districts face a unique set of challenges. Because of their small numbers of English language learner students, sometimes only a part-time teacher is necessary. Also, because non-native speaking families tend to move in and out of school districts with regularity, an ENL teacher may not be needed on staff every year or for the entire year.

“As a small rural district we really only need a half-time ENL teacher due to the small number of students,” said Todd Green, superintendent of the Beaver River school district in Lewis County. “So recruiting that position is quite difficult. And then because the numbers aren’t consistent from year to year, we might not need an ENL teacher for a couple of years.”⁶

According to Thomas Burns, the superintendent of the St. Lawrence-Lewis BOCES, only two of the 18 component districts in his BOCES service area employ ENL teachers.

“In a given year, we only ever have a handful of people that are certified to teach ELL,” said Burns. “Several districts send their ENL students to the Lisbon school district, which has a teacher, and Lisbon just bills the other districts back. Fortunately, we do not have many ESL students given. The few students we have tend to be the children of migrant farm workers, or the children of staff who are foreign-born and work at one of the region’s four colleges and universities.”⁸

Not all school districts in New York have students that qualify for ENL services. Ac-

⁴ Personal communication with Marisa Bel. April 24, 2019.

⁵ Personal communication with Mark Potter. April 8, 2019.

⁶ Personal communication with Todd Green. April 8, 2019.

⁷ NYSSBA analysis of New York State Education Department data. Retrieved from www.p12nysed.gov/irs/

⁸ Personal communication with Thomas Burns. March 27, 2019.

⁹ Personal communication with Kristen Wilcox. February 25, 2019.