

Report indicates that English learners face severe inequities and substandard conditions in New Jersey schools

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English learners in New Jersey public schools, already facing inadequate supports and a lack of attention, missed out on critical services during

the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a new report that a Rutgers faculty member helped edit.

The report, *English Learners in New Jersey: Exposing Inequities and Expanding Opportunities in the Wake of the Pandemic*, found that many [school](#) districts fail to meet the New Jersey Bilingual Education Code standards or comply with federal law.

In the 2020-2021 school year, New Jersey enrolled over 93,000 English-learning students, making up approximately 7 percent of the total enrolled student population. The number of English learners enrolled in New Jersey schools has nearly doubled since 2010.

The report authors, who surveyed 80 English as a second language (ESL) educators, administrators and counselors and conducted listening sessions with parents, caregivers and youth between April and July 2021, examined the accommodations English learners were offered before and during the period of disruption for students and families.

Over one-third of educators who responded said the lack of compliance with state regulations for ELs was a "major problem" at their school. Nearly one-third of survey respondents reported no language accommodations in English-only classes for English learners at their school before the pandemic, while 10 percent said that Google translate was the primary or sole language accommodation their school offered to their English-learning students. Nearly half of respondents reported no bilingual mental health services in their district for English learners, even during the pandemic.

According to the report, 26 percent of respondents reported no attendance recovery policy at their school—a policy to permit students to earn credit or graduate to the next grade where they have accrued some absences from class. Other educators reported their school failed to

communicate their policy to English learners. At some schools, English learners are dropping out in high numbers, with one educator reporting 180 dropouts in their district during the pandemic.

The organization's recommendations include: The NJ Department of Education, the State Legislature and the governor's office should develop an accountability process to make sure every school district complies with the Bilingual Education Code; revise the code to require and improve language accommodations; mandate professional development for educators; create a "complaint investigation" system to react to reports of violations; and provide culturally appropriate and bilingual counseling services to help English learners cope with the effects of the pandemic and other life stressors.

"It's been an honor to support the tremendous efforts of the organizations behind the report as they worked to document and share the experiences of English language [learners](#) in New Jersey's schools," said Mary Curran, director of local-global partnerships in the department of learning and teaching at Rutgers Graduate School of Education, who assisted in editing the report. "The report reveals many inequities and lack of compliance with state code. It makes urgent recommendations and is timely as the New Jersey Department of Education Bilingual Education Code is up for revision. We urge that immediate actions are taken to put our recommendations in action."

The report was written by the NJ Consortium for Immigrant Children, NJ Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages/NJ Bilingual Educators, and Education Law Center.

More information: The report is available as a PDF at [njtesol-njbe.org/wp-content/up ... EL_Report_11.15.pdf](https://njtesol-njbe.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/EL_Report_11.15.pdf)

Provided by Rutgers University

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