

Gaps and Opportunities in Professional Development of Minnesota English Learner Educators

Results of Statewide Survey

Introduction

In 2022, the Southeast Service Cooperative (SSC) Project MOMENTUM received a five-year National Professional Development Grant from the U.S. Department of Education Office of English Language Acquisition. Project MOMENTUM works to increase the availability of professional learning opportunities and support for educators by developing and offering accessible and high quality microcredential courses to educators in Minnesota. By doing so, the project hopes to improve the academic outcomes of multilingual learners.

To learn more about the current instructional environment for multilingual learners in Minnesota and professional development opportunities for educators and school leaders in Minnesota, Project MOMENTUM collaborated with MinneTESOL, Minnesota Education Equity Partnership (MnEEP), and the University of Minnesota Department of Curriculum and Instruction to gather data from educators and school leaders (herein referred to as educators).

Wilder Research worked with Project MOMENTUM to design an online survey based on research instruments shared by researchers at California State University Northridge (CSUN) and the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). The original survey instrument was funded by the U.S. Department of Education and developed through a partnership of seven states (Arkansas, Arizona, Ohio, Michigan, Mississippi, Washington, and Wisconsin) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).

The survey asked educators about their knowledge about instruction of multilingual learners, the supports and services for multilingual learners and their families at their school district and in Minnesota, their participation in professional learning opportunities within the past 12 months, future professional learning interests, and supports for teachers who work with multilingual learners in Minnesota. The educators were also asked about the name of their school or district, their role or position, and whether they speak other languages than English.

Project MOMENTUM staff invited the educators to complete the survey during a MinneTESOL meeting in November 2023 and by sending email invitations to the Minnesota Department of Education contacts, including English Language Learner coordinators, migrant liaisons, coordinators for WIDA e-learning, Bilingual Seals and Language Program coordinators, bilingual family engagement coordinators, and Minnesota educational organizations. The survey was conducted from late November 2023 through early March 2024. A total of 314 educators completed it. To thank the survey respondents, they were entered into a raffle to win one of five \$50 gift cards.

Findings

School procedures for supporting multilingual learners

Most educators reported that their school has effective procedures for identifying English learners (87% slightly, moderately, or strongly agreed with the statement) and Recently Arrived English Learners (RAEL -78%). Most of them also reported that the English learners at their school receive grade-level instruction that is aligned to the state content standards (84%). However, fewer than 60% of the educators reported that the school has effective procedures for differentiating challenges due to learning English as an additional language from challenges due to learning differences or disabilities and that all teachers in the school viewed themselves as responsible for helping English learners develop English proficiency. Almost two-thirds of the educators (64%) slightly, moderately, or strongly agreed that English learners at their school receive grade-level instruction and supports that are aligned with the WIDA Standards Framework, meaning that slightly more than one-third (36%) disagreed with the statement (Figure 1).

1. School procedures

Our school has effective procedures for...	N	Percentage of educators					
		Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
identifying English learners.	291	4%	5%	5%	12%	35%	40%
differentiating challenges due to learning English as an additional language from challenges due to learning differences/disabilities.	297	12%	17%	14%	25%	22%	11%
identifying students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE).	246	10%	9%	9%	21%	33%	18%
identifying Recently Arrived English Learners (RAEL).	278	8%	6%	8%	16%	28%	35%
identifying students who are long-term (experienced) English learners (5+ years of service/identification).	269	9%	9%	8%	17%	27%	29%
All teachers in this school view themselves as responsible for helping English learners develop English proficiency	298	16%	17%	15%	19%	21%	11%
English learners at this school receive grade-level...							
instruction and supports that are aligned to the WIDA Standards Framework	246	8%	15%	14%	22%	24%	18%
instruction that is aligned to the state content standard	273	4%	7%	6%	12%	38%	34%

Note. Some educators (ranging from 16 to 68 educators on each item) indicated they were unsure; their responses were not included.

Educator knowledge about instruction of English learners

Across the instructional knowledge topics listed in Figure 2, 23% to 66% of educators reported they were moderately or highly knowledgeable about each of the topics. Sixty to 66% of educators reported they were moderately or highly knowledgeable in models or approaches to teaching multilingual learners, the statewide annual English Language Proficiency assessment, identification procedures for English learners, and culturally competent instructional practices. Lower percentages of educators said they were knowledgeable in monitoring procedures for former English learners, requirements for obtaining a Seal of Biliteracy, and Minnesota LEAPS Act (23%-37% of educators reported that they were moderately or highly knowledgeable on these topics; Figure 2).

2. Instructional knowledge

How knowledgeable are you about the following topics related to instruction of English learners?	Percentage of educators				
	N	Not at all	A little bit	Moderately	Highly
The state's English language proficiency standards	278	18%	32%	26%	24%
Identification procedures for English learners (e.g., language usage survey, ELP screener)	276	15%	27%	23%	37%
The statewide annual ELP assessment (WIDA ACCESS)	273	18%	22%	20%	40%
Models/approaches to teaching multilingual learners	277	8%	26%	35%	31%
State expectations concerning annual English learner progress	278	19%	35%	28%	18%
Exit/reclassification procedures for English learners	280	20%	27%	21%	32%
Monitoring procedures for former (exited/reclassified) English learners	280	28%	34%	22%	15%
Requirements for obtaining a Seal of Biliteracy	280	48%	29%	15%	8%
Culturally competent instructional practices that support racially equitable academic outcomes for multilingual learners	280	13%	26%	35%	25%
Minnesota Learning English for Academic Proficiency and Success (LEAPS) Act	280	40%	30%	21%	9%

School environment and practices to support multilingual learners

Most educators felt their school has a welcoming environment and high expectations for their multilingual learners (90% and 80% agreeing with the statements, respectively). Most (77%) also reported that the school provides social/emotional supports for multilingual learners with additional needs. Smaller shares of educators agreed or strongly agreed that their school designs instruction aligned with content standards and the WIDA English Language Development standards framework; leverages the assets of students like home language, prior knowledge and cultures to promote content learning; or uses summative state data to inform instruction and continuous program improvement (48-61% of educators on each statement; Figure 3).

3. School environment and practices

	N	Percentage of educators			
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Create welcoming environments for multilingual learners	252	1%	10%	50%	40%
Have high expectations for multilingual learners	242	3%	17%	51%	29%
Recognize and value multilingual learner assets (promote use and development of home languages, have libraries and instructional resources in diverse languages)	240	4%	28%	42%	25%
Use a variety of tools (formative assessments, interviews, focus groups) to identify multilingual learner needs for additional academic and social supports	227	9%	26%	45%	19%
Provide social/emotional supports (counseling, links to community resources, health resources) for multilingual learners with additional needs	232	6%	17%	49%	28%
Enact lessons that integrate the development of disciplinary content and language	224	8%	26%	48%	18%
Design instruction aligned to content standards and WIDA ELD Standards Framework	187	17%	35%	34%	14%
Leverage the assets of students like home language, prior knowledge and cultures to promote content learning	215	10%	31%	42%	17%
Use summative state data, including ELP data, to inform instruction and continuous program improvement	210	11%	28%	44%	17%

Note. Some educators (ranging from 10 to 74 educators on each item) indicated they were unsure; their responses were not included.

School relationships with families of multilingual learners

In general, most educators felt positive about their school communication with families of multilingual learners. For example, nearly all of the educators (90%) slightly, moderately, or strongly agreed that families of their multilingual learners understand why their child was classified as an English learner and 86% of educators agreed that families of their multilingual learners are aware of the English Language Development programs/services at their school. However, a smaller share of educators agreed that families of their multilingual learners participate in school-sponsored events (66%) or seek out information from the school about their child's progress (58%).

4. School-family communication and relationships

	N	Percentage of educators					
		Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Moderately agree	Strongly agree
Our school implements effective procedures for communicating with families of our multilingual learners	240	4%	12%	9%	21%	35%	20%
Our school knows the preferred language of communication of the families of our multilingual learners	245	2%	6%	4%	15%	29%	44%
Families of our English learners understand why their child was classified as an English learner	207	2%	3%	5%	16%	41%	33%
Families of our multilingual learners are aware of the ELD programs / services available at this school	189	3%	3%	8%	26%	38%	22%
Families of our English learners understand that they can decline (or opt out of) ELD services	165	2%	3%	9%	22%	33%	32%
Families of our English Learners are aware of the criteria for exit/ reclassification	164	3%	7%	13%	33%	30%	13%
Families of our English learners seek out information from the school about their child's progress	192	8%	13%	21%	28%	21%	9%
Families of our multilingual learners participate in school-sponsored events.	208	6%	12%	16%	32%	21%	13%

Note. Some educators (ranging from 12 to 85 educators on each item) indicated they were unsure; their responses were not included.

Professional development

Educators were asked if they participated in a list of professional development opportunities in the past 12 months. Most of the educators (82%) said they participated in professional development offered by their school or district. Of those who participated in any of these opportunities, the majority responded “somewhat” or “to a great deal” about the extent to which the professional development they took offered high quality professional learning to improve instruction of multilingual learners (Figure 5).

5. Professional development participation

	Percentage of educators who participated in the past 12 months (N=207)	Of those who participated, percentage who reported “somewhat” or “to a great deal” ^a (N=10-159)
Minnesota English Learner Education (MELEd) Conference	31%	100%
WIDA eLearning Courses	33%	82%
Project MOMENTUM Courses	5%	100%
School/District Provided CEUs	82%	74%
College/University Courses	27%	90%

^a Educators were asked to what extent the professional development offers high quality professional learning to improve instruction of multilingual learners. Response options: not at all, very little, somewhat, to a great deal.

When asked about their interest in future professional development, about half of the educators (45-56%) indicated they were somewhat or very interested in all the professional development options listed in Figure 6, except for K-12 ESL as an initial license (25%) (Figure 6).

6. Future interest in professional development

	N	Percentage of educators		
		Not at all interested	Somewhat interested	Very interested
K-12 ESL as an initial license	95	76%	12%	13%
K-12 ESL as an additional license	119	55%	19%	26%
Bilingual/Bicultural endorsement	154	44%	40%	16%
Leadership certificate for Title III / EL coordinators	176	48%	30%	22%
Leadership certificate for School Administrators in supporting multilingual learners	154	53%	30%	17%
Certificate for supporting multilingual learners in PreK/early learning	169	47%	34%	19%

Educators were also asked to select up to three professional development topics that they would be most interested in from a list of options. The top five topics selected were: language difference vs. disability, collaboration and co-teaching, students with interrupted formal education, language for content areas, and Multi-Tiered System of Supports (Figure 7).

7. Professional development topics

	Percentage indicating interest (N=219)
Language difference vs. disability	45%
Collaboration and co-teaching	38%
Students with interrupted formal education	31%
Language for content areas	30%
Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)	28%
Recently Arrived English Learners	23%
Long-term (experienced) English learners	23%
Dual eligible students	16%
Refugee populations	16%
WIDA 2020 standards framework	16%
Translanguaging	13%
Other (e.g., grading for equity, successful strategies for teaching multilingual learners, including middle and high school students, literacy in a dual language immersion setting)	3%

Note. Educators were asked to pick up to three topics. Therefore, responses do not total 100%.

Support for multilingual learners, families, and teachers

When asked how they would rate support for **multilingual learners** in Minnesota on a scale from 1 (no support) to 10 (very high support), the 226 educators who answered the question gave responses ranging from 1 to 10, for an average of 6.4. In an open-ended question, 82 educators provided comments about their ratings. These comments were coded into one or more themes (Figure 8). Education and training for professionals was mentioned the most. Note that although the educators were asked about support for multilingual learners, their responses reflected supports for educators or parents that indirectly impact the students.

8. Support for multilingual learners

	Percentage of responses that were coded into category (N=119)
Education and training for professionals (e.g., for general education teachers, about adapting curriculum for multilingual learner needs or implementing the standards, ongoing professional development for all teachers who teach multilingual learners)	23%
Resources/supports from government or community (e.g., guidance to school districts about specific supports for multilingual learners)	17%
Funding (e.g., funding for more and various staff in schools, more funding for resources and support in rural areas, greater MN)	14%
Supports (e.g., more supports for multilingual learners in rural areas or districts with low numbers of multilingual learners, better support in general)	13%
Staffing (e.g., more full-time staff, bilingual staff, interpreters)	12%
Staff qualifications and quality measures (e.g., licensed staff, evaluation metrics for staff serving multilingual learners)	7%
Communication (e.g., more materials or documents to be translated into multilingual learners' first language)	4%
Curriculum (e.g., more curriculum designed for multilingual learner needs)	4%
Programs (e.g., support in ECSE programs; dedicated immersion programs)	3%
Parent support (e.g., promote parent involvement)	1%
Other	3%

Selected quotes are included below.

Full time EL staff in our building, more interpreters in the school.

Funding for more multilingual paraprofessional and ESL teachers. I also think that the WIDA test expectations need to be looked at, especially for our students who are dual identified (ESL and Special Education).

Large schools with high populations are more successful in supporting MLLs. However, I feel that rural districts and/or districts with low MLL populations don't have the same ability to support their MLLs.

Clearer support and policies for districts and administrators to better support teachers and students.

More consistency in resources available statewide.

More legislation in what has to be provided. Currently, the guidelines from MDE can be used so loosely and it's easy for districts to under-fund ELD programs because it isn't as legally bound as other programs such as SPED.

More professional development for content area and classroom teachers so they know how to differentiate for MLLs.

More staff members with an expertise in supporting multilingual learners available to collaborate and support teachers.

More translated documents.

When asked how they would rate support for **multilingual learner families** in Minnesota on a scale from 1 (no support) to 10 (very high support), the 223 educators who answered the question gave responses ranging from 1 to 10, for an average of 5.9. In an open-ended question, 57 educators provided comments about their ratings. These

comments were coded into one or more themes. Cultural responsiveness and communication were mentioned the most (Figure 9).

9. Support for multilingual learner families

	Percentage of responses that were coded into category (N=79)
Cultural responsiveness (e.g., more cultural inclusiveness in school activities)	20%
Communication (e.g., increase communication with families; inform families about resources/how to navigate educational systems)	19%
Resources/supports from government/community (e.g., feedback loops for families to share their needs with government, MDE to provide models for best practices to support multilingual learner families)	17%
Supports (e.g., supports for families or schools with multilingual families in rural areas or greater MN, coordination of supports between school and community)	11%
Staffing (e.g., more bilingual staff, cultural liaison staff)	10%
Funding (e.g., increase funding for liaison supports, more funding in rural areas)	9%
Education and training for professionals (e.g., more education/training for all school staff in how to support multilingual learner families)	5%
Programs (e.g., supports for ECSE programs)	1%
Staff qualifications (e.g., evaluation of staff)	1%
Other	6%

Below are selected quotes.

It seems there are many community supports available for our families, though I don't know how well the supports are communicated with the families. I know there's work needed in the language access for families as well.

I don't feel we do a great job of surveying our families to see what they need from us in the schools when we provide sessions or supports. We need to be more culturally responsive to the needs of our families and community in our programming and language access.

It's available but not utilized as much as they should. Again, there are not enough liaisons to satisfy the need for more frequent communication. There NEEDS to be language classes for the parents!

Many multilingual families in rural areas have absolutely no one in the school their children attend that can even speak to them (the parents) in their own language. Providing school districts in rural MN with not only the resources, but especially the funding to accomplish this would be very beneficial for these families.

More family friendly translated materials in a greater number of languages.

It's crucial to prioritize enhanced communication with LEP families. Currently, there is a notable gap in effectively understanding and addressing their needs. Slowing down and actively listening to their concerns and preferences is paramount. We must engage in meaningful dialogue by asking how they best communicate and what support mechanisms they require—whether it's audio translations for those who may be illiterate or written translations for others. Above all, we need to shift from talking at them to actively listening and engaging with them. Often, in our haste to meet deadlines, we overlook the valuable insights they provide. By taking the time to listen and understand their perspectives, we can tailor our support to align with their actual needs, fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for LEP families.

The Language Line is a great resource offered by the state. There are many wonderful dedicated bilingual ESPs/interpreters, but I would like to see more support and training for them.¹

Schools should connect with ALL families of multilingual learners, not just those receiving services.

More procedures in place for welcoming ML families and requirements for communication policies, school events that are inclusive, Driver's License support, etc.

I think in our schools we provide good communication in the first language, but I don't think we think beyond that. I do not see very much evidence of recognizing that the first culture of multilingual families is valued and included. However, I will say, that in four of our schools, we now have Native American liaisons, who are offering programs that share the Ojibwe culture, to help the entire student body become aware of the history in the locations where the school is built. It would be good to use that model to bring more awareness to the cultures and languages of multilingual families.

When asked how they would rate support for **teachers who work with multilingual learners** in Minnesota on a scale from 1 (no support) to 10 (very high support), the 225 educators who answered the question gave responses ranging from 1 to 10, for an average of 5.9. In an open-ended question, 64 educators provided comments about their ratings. These comments were coded into one or more themes. Education and training for professionals was mentioned the most (Figure 10).

10. Support for teachers who work with multilingual learners

	Percentage of responses that were coded into category (N=90)
Education and training for professionals (e.g., more frequent professional development opportunities, guidelines on monitoring students after they exit English Language services)	32%
Staffing (e.g., more teachers, interpreters)	19%
Supports (e.g., support for general education teachers, for rural schools)	16%
Communication (e.g., more opportunities for communication or collaboration for multilingual learner teachers among themselves and with general education)	12%

¹ The Minnesota Department of Education offers TransAct to districts and charter schools. Contracts with Language Line are funded at the district-level and not by the state.

10. Support for teachers who work with multilingual learners (continued)

	Percentage of responses that were coded into category (N=90)
Funding (e.g., more funding for high-needs areas)	6%
Programs (e.g., support for ESCE programs)	4%
Resources/supports from state government, community (e.g., clearer policies regarding support services for multilingual learners)	3%
Other	2%

Selected quotes are included below.

EL teachers have a lot of support. I wish the state would do less "speaking to the choir" and educate more to the content teacher forums, building admin spaces, and superintendents.

I don't know if teachers have enough access to trainings, etc. to support them with working with multilingual students in the classroom. School admin should make that a priority, but it doesn't always seem like it, other than the occasional mandated training on EL students.

I think there are a number of opportunities, but I don't know if everyone knows that they exist. We have a number of EL teachers in rural areas without EL licenses.

MLL teachers who co-teach are stretched very thin and there are no consistent expectations for what co-teaching looks like.

Rules about how many students or different levels can be on each teacher's caseload (lower number for SLIFE, Refugee, RAELs, and level 1 students). Also, more expectations of general education teachers of following the modifications needed.

I think they try hard but lack resources and training. Too many other initiatives or higher priorities are set by administrators and school leaders. Also, as a country, we lack authentic resources for schools and teachers. When will we recognize and act on the fact that there probably are more multilingual learners in this country and state than monolingual learners.

If anything, I think support is decreasing. Caseloads are too high and students are too spread out, leaving ML teachers spread too thin to service effectively. Classroom and other teachers are not receiving high-quality, sustained PD about our ML student learning needs.

MinneTESOL is a wonderful support group! However, having only 1 yearly conference means that there is not a continual line of communication available (that I know of) where all ML teachers, staff, and supporters, can "mingle" per se to lean on each other and lean into new ideas and solutions.

More time to collaborate, co-teach, funding for a high-needs area, good contracts and pension to keep good teachers teaching, more admin training so they know how to create and maintain supportive language environments school wide.

Need more that have the credentials.

Educator characteristics

Educators were asked the school or district they worked at and their primary role and whether they spoke languages other than English. Educators could choose to provide answers to the questions.

School districts

The 151 educator respondents who answered the question indicated they worked in public school districts located in various counties in Minnesota, including:

Anoka County Centennial Fridley	Goodhue County Cannon Falls Goodhue Pine Island	Mower County Austin	Steele County Medford Owatonna
Becker County Detroit Lakes	Hennepin County Brooklyn Center Eden Prairie Hopkins Minneapolis Richfield Robbinsdale St. Anthony-New Brighton St. Louis Park	Nobles County Worthington	Todd County Bertha-Hewitt Browerville Long Prairie-Grey Eagle Staples-Motley
Beltrami County Bemidji		Olmsted County Rochester Stewartville	Wabasha County Lake City Plainview-Elgin-Millville Zumbrota-Mazeppa
Blue Earth County Mankato		Ramsey County Mounds View North Saint Paul- Maplewood-Oakdale Roseville Saint Paul	Wadena County Menahga
Brown County New Ulm Saint James Sleepy Eye	Houston County Caledonia Houston	Rice County Faribault	Washington County Mahtomedi Stillwater
Cass County Pillager Pine River-Backus	Isanti County Cambridge-Isanti	Rock County Luverne	Winona County Lewiston-Altura Saint Charles Winona
Chisago County Rush City St. Croix River	Kandiyohi County New London-Spicer	Roseau County Warroad	Wright County Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose Dassel-Cokato
Crow Wing Brainerd	Lyon County Lakeview	Sherburne County Big Lake Elk River	Yellow Medicine County Yellow Medicine
Dakota County Burnsville-Eagan-Savage Intermediate West Saint Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan	Martin County Fairmont	Stearns County Albany Belgrade-Brooten-Elrosa Kimball Melrose Rocori Saint Cloud	
Dodge County Hayfield Kasson-Mantorville Triton	McLeod County Hutchinson		
	Morrison County Little Falls Piertz		

In addition, some respondents worked in one of the following charter, tribal, or private schools or cooperatives: Academic Arts High School, Aurora Charter School, Cannon Valley Special Education Cooperative, Cologne Academy, Fond Du Lac Ojibwe Tribal School, Freshwater Education District, Hiawatha Academics, Kaleidoscope Charter School, Lakes International Language Academy, Prodeo Academy, Southwest-West Central Service Cooperative, Risen Christ Catholic School, Skyline Math and Science Academy, STRIDE Academy, and Twin Cities German Immersion Charter School.

Roles or position

More than 20% of the educators who completed the survey indicated that they were classroom teachers or English Language Development or English Learner Teachers (Figure 11).

11. Educator role or position

	Percentage (N=223)
Classroom teacher	27%
ELD / English Learner teacher	22%
Title III / English Learner coordinator	8%
Education support professional	6%
School administrator	7%
Other (e.g., instructional coach, school counselor, special education teacher, speech language pathologist, parent engagement coordinator, Q Comp coordinator, liaison)	30%

Languages

Seventy-three educators indicated that they are fluent or conversational in languages other than English. Spanish was mentioned by the most educators (71%). Other languages included French, German, Swedish, Finnish, Italian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Russian, Hindi, Ojibwe, and American Sign Language (each ranging from one to five educators).