

**Evaluation of the  
Madison Metropolitan School District  
English Language Learner  
Three-year Plan  
Executive Summary**

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## Executive Summary

In Spring 2019, the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) conducted a comprehensive evaluation of services provided and programs implemented in response to the Madison Metropolitan School District's (MMSD) 2015 English Language Learner (ELL) Plan. The ELL Plan identifies six key areas for reform. The areas of reform are (1) ELL Communication and Monitoring Systems; (2) Professional Learning and Building System Capacity; (3) ELLs: English as a Second Language Services; (4) ELLs: Bilingual Education Services; (5) Diversity within Bilingual Programs; and (6) Community Building. The overall approach described in the 2015 ELL Plan was guided by MMSD's commitment to promoting effective educational practices that are responsive to the cultural and linguistic assets of all students as well as to equity of access to quality education.

CAL's evaluation of the ELL Plan's implementation, outcomes, and impact, was conducted at the end of the implementation cycle of the 2015 ELL Plan. The plan identifies ways in which MMSD has been successful in achieving its goals, areas where further work is needed, and recommendations for improvement.

The evaluation is critically informed by four key sources: (a) a culturally and linguistically responsive, equity-focused approach (Gay, 2010); (b) the *Guiding Principles for Dual Language Education* (Howard, Lindholm-Leary, Rogers, Olague, Medina, Kennedy, Sugarman & Christian, 2018); (c) established principles for best practice in ELL education as outlined in *The Practice Guide for Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School* released by the Institute of Education Sciences (Baker et al., 2014), and in correspondence with (d) The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2013), and the Guided Language Acquisition Design (Orange County Department of Education, n.d.).

Informed by these research-based sources, the evaluation focused on the following three objectives:

- To what extent have strategies included in the ELL Plan been implemented?
- To what extent have indicators included in the ELL Plan shown improvement in the duration of the plan?
- To what extent have stakeholders been satisfied with the implementation and outcomes of the plan?

To address these objectives, CAL employed a mixed-methods approach. Data collection included document reviews and secondary analyses of student participation and assessment data. This included grade level, gender, ethnicity/race, home language, qualification for special education, classification as "low income," ELL status, program, and a variety of language proficiency and academic performance assessment data.

The quantitative data were complemented by qualitative reviews. This included an online survey distributed to 2,222 school-based staff, of which 716 staff responded. Focus groups and classroom observations were conducted on-site. Ten bilingual program schools and 16 ESL program schools were visited by CAL evaluators during two weeks in March, 2019. Participation in focus groups conducted on-site included 179 individuals representing district-

level and school-based administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Evaluators conducted classroom observations in 29 bilingual program classrooms and 36 ESL program classrooms.

In general, the staff of the Office of Multilingual and Global Education (OMGE) should be commended for the ambitious and admirable undertaking they embarked on to fulfill the tasks outlined in the ELL Plan. The ELL Plan was carefully developed with abundant stakeholder participation and its enactment has been no easy task. Thanks to the knowledgeable, capable and undeniably dedicated staff at OMGE much progress has been made – and yet there is more to do. This evaluation is intended to provide information that MMSD and OMGE can use to continue their improvement efforts to benefit ELLs and their families. A full account of successes, areas in need of improvement, and recommendations can be found in the Summary Recommendations section of the full report.

The quantitative analyses of student performance outcomes revealed reasons for both concern and optimism from the perspective of academic achievement and English language proficiency outcomes. For example, current ELLs do not generally fare well on standardized assessments since these students are not yet proficient in English and these tests have not been validated for them. The proportion of ELLs performing at “proficient or advanced” or “college-ready” on MMSD’s assessments of academic achievement was extremely far below that of students never classified as ELLs.

At the same time, students classified as “proficient or advanced” or “college-ready” in the former ELL student group outperformed never ELLs on the mandatory grades 3–8 assessments (Wisconsin Forward and MAP). (It is important to keep in mind that a third of former ELLs were still not meeting grade-level expectations.) The superior performance of ELLs narrowed around eighth grade. Former ELL students did not outperform never ELL students on the high school assessments (ACT Aspire and ACT). Currently MMSD reports the performance of current ELLs and former ELLs as one subgroup. It is recommended that current ELL and former ELL academic outcomes are disaggregated in future reporting so as to better evaluate the performance of each of these two subgroups.

With respect to their ability to illustrate the differences between the current ELL, former ELL, and never ELL subgroups, the Wisconsin Forward and MAP assessments provided similar information. While clearly there are many inputs into decision-making based on assessments, from the perspective of evaluating the performance of these subgroups of students, two assessments may be unnecessary, and the district may wish to consider moving to a single assessment of academic outcomes.

In respect to English language proficiency outcomes, data showed year-to-year fluctuations in the rates of students reclassified as former ELLs, with an apparent drop in reclassification rates for 2017–18. During this time period, there were changes to the criteria used to classify students as ELLs; therefore, this drop was not unexpected. Unfortunately, certain subgroups of ELLs are taking longer to reach proficiency. These include low-income students who, on average, took about 1.5 years longer to exit ELL services than students who were not low income, and Hispanic students who, on average, took about a year longer to exit ELL services than did non-Hispanic students. Long-term ELLs pose a significant challenge in MMSD: data showed that between one-half and three-quarters of ELL students in each grade 6-12 have been classified as ELLs for more than 5 years. Additionally, students classified as ELLs for more

than 5 years were 1.5 times more likely than the general population of students to receive special education services.

In reference to students in bilingual programs, the limited Spanish data available indicated that while a large percentage of students in K-2 were meeting grade-level benchmarks for literacy (with a larger proportion of native English speakers than Spanish speakers meeting these benchmarks), the literacy skills of middle school students in Spanish were extremely low.

Key recommendations in the area of collecting and reporting data include:

- Consider using one rather than two assessments given that the Wisconsin Forward and MAP assessments provide similar information.
- Disaggregate current ELL and former ELL academic outcomes so as to better evaluate the performance of each of these two subgroups.
- Provide greater consistency in the administration of Spanish language assessments to be able to better understand students' Spanish language outcomes in bilingual programs.
- Based on the quantitative data obtained from MMSD, it appears that the academic performance of students in bilingual programs is primarily measured through English assessment. The partner-language student assessment data (Spanish only) obtained from MMSD were quite limited.

The qualitative review of the implementation of the ELL Plan revealed a wide range of services, guidance, and supports provided to bilingual and ESL programs by MMSD and, in particular by OMGE, addressing each of the six ELL Plan initiatives.

In the area of **ELL Communications and Monitoring Systems**, MMSD realized the dire need for a web-based data system for the collection, management, and communication of data related to ELLs. The adopted system (Oasys®) has been generally well received and is being utilized by staff. There have been some challenges: in particular, the system for distributing the ELL Individual Plan of Service (IPS) form to parents, and the lack of awareness and use of the ELL STAT data dashboard. Also, unfortunately, Oasys® has been found not to have the ability to optimally serve the ELL population; for example, the system is not able to create the kind of reports needed for the ELL-specific population. To MMSD's credit, a better aligned system has been adopted, which should lead to better documentation and communication with families of ELLs.

Key recommendations in this area include:

- Form a committee of staff made up of OMGE and school-based representatives to reflect on the IPS form distribution and collection process to discuss ways to improve the efficiency and efficacy of the process.
- Make staff more aware of and train them in the use of the ELL STAT data dashboard.
- Continue to encourage and support the advisory/case management process in the high schools as a mechanism for ensuring that every ELL's needs are being met and challenges and successes are shared with families.
- Provide more Bilingual Resource Specialists (BRSs) in the schools to perform the important function of communicating with and engaging the families of ELLs.

Reacting to needs for **Professional Learning and Building System Capacity**, OMGE provided many learning opportunities for teachers of ELLs. These included professional development in GLAD, Q-TEL, ESL Redesign, and Special Education services related to the needs of ELLs. OMGE also provided tuition assistance for teachers to obtain ESL and bilingual certification.

A major impediment to providing MMSD staff with the tools and knowledge they need to effectively serve ELLs is the lack of calendar time allocated by MMSD to carry out this training, and the lack of substitutes to fill in for teachers during training. A particular area of need is the topic of ELLs and special education. Key recommendations in this area include:

- Give OMGE more school-year calendar time annually, and secure substitutes, so that OMGE can provide PD to teachers of ELLs, including training on programming and instructional guidance.
- Ensure that offices across the MMSD district administration include ELL-related perspectives in all district initiatives and in PD. Similarly, PD initiatives of OMGE should be fully embraced and supported by other central offices of MMSD.
- Continue and expand GLAD training.
- Continue QTEL training and evaluate the degree of implementation and buy-in after it has been used in the district for a longer period of time.

Support to **English as a Second Language (ESL)** programs under the plan was successful in many ways. In its review of extant documentation related to ESL program services, CAL found that OMGE has developed an array of curricular guidance documents to assist general education teachers in serving ELLs, and the ESL/BRT resource teachers who support them, and to provide standards-based instruction for ELLs that integrates the development of academic language with content instruction. Unfortunately, many teachers were either unaware or did not use many of these materials. During classroom observations, CAL evaluators noted the use of many successful practices while, at the same time, noting gaps in the use of effective methods. Many teachers are in need of teaching materials. While the use of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) was observed in many secondary classrooms serving ELLs, there was very little attention to CRT at the elementary level. Of particular consequence were the inadequate human resources dedicated to effectively serving ELL students across grade levels. Additionally, CAL observed a need for greater supports for students with limited formal education (SLIFE) and long-term ELLs. Key recommendations for the improvement of ESL services for ELLs include:

- Give teachers more training and curricular guidance on expectations and instructional requirements for ELLs.
- Provide opportunities for teachers to purchase content and English language development (ELD)-aligned materials that will meet their students' needs.
- Target programmatic improvements for long-term ELLs and newcomer SLIFE students at the secondary level.
- Improve counseling and other supports for the bio-social-emotional well-being of the students and their families.
- Provide professional development to target instructional practices for the development of *academic language*. This will benefit *all* students.
- Reconsider dropping the staffing ratio of ELL teachers from 1:35 to 1:45. In fact, more specialized staff members are needed, rather than less.
- Require that classroom teachers of ELLs become dually-certified.

- Hire bilingual human resources staff for recruitment and processing purposes.
- Evaluate the extent to which all offices in the central administration support ELLs.

A review of **Bilingual Education Services** revealed many successes while challenges still lie ahead. There was enthusiasm around and commitment to DLI and DBE programs from the various MMSD stakeholders and awareness of the need for greater diversity and integration of the two strands. OMGE staff were highly knowledgeable about bilingual education and were undeniably dedicated to the students in DLI and DBE programs in the district. OMGE developed outreach resources for current and prospective DLI/DBE parents and myriad curricular and administrative guidance documents. During classroom observations, CAL evaluators observed both model practices and the need for continued instructional support. Generally there is a shortage of qualified bilingual staff, although this has been ameliorated by the transition from 90:10 programs to 50:50 programs. There is also a need for administrators and educators new to bilingual programming to receive professional development on the basic tenets of dual language education. The following are key recommendations:

- Prioritize hiring bilingual certified teachers and support staff.
- Provide systematic professional development and coaching for administrators and educators new to bilingual programming.
- Continue to provide training on the differences between the 90/10 and 50/50 dual language education models for educators, administrators, students, and parents.
- Provide professional development to teachers on biliteracy strategies that promote the development of metalinguistic awareness in their students.

Another major initiative of the ELL Plan addressed **Diversity in Bilingual Programs**. MMSD's efforts to increase diversity in its bilingual programs are commendable, and the need is warranted as attested to by both quantitative and qualitative data. The need for greater diversity in the bilingual programs appears to be embraced by stakeholders from the various demographic groups themselves. While outreach efforts within school communities are a good start, it is important to cast a wide net and reach out to the community at large, where individuals may know less about bilingual programs districtwide. The current lottery system is not seen as fair by certain segments of the MMSD community. Key recommendations are:

- Convene a committee of school staff and community members committed to bilingual programs and reflect on what has worked and has not worked so far. Develop a continuation plan.
- Involve all stakeholders in efforts, ensuring that all demographic backgrounds are included and have a voice.
- Focus staff recruitment efforts on hiring DLI staff from diverse backgrounds, including African Americans.
- Increase transportation services to DLI sites for underrepresented populations, such as African American and Asian students.

Finally, the evaluation considered the **Community Building** aspect of the ELL Plan. This initiative recognized the need to build community in schools with bilingual and non-bilingual programs. The ELL Parent Advisory Group appeared to be very active and to embrace the role as advocates of their children's education, as evidenced by participation in the focus group with CAL researchers and documentation provided by OMGE. Some of the schools visited were engaged in efforts to promote equity and increased collaboration between strands within

schools by having periodic joint activities around culture with a focus on the cultures represented in the school. In other schools, this type of community building activity was not observed. Although some inroads have been made, community has not yet been built in all schools with both bilingual and nonbilingual programs. Key community building recommendations include the continuation of the use of school community-building practices while adopting a more active role in implementing intentionally inclusive policies, practices, and outreach aimed at increasing collaboration between strands within schools and making all members of the community feel valued, honored, and included in the school community. Explore the possibility of establishing whole-school DLI programs, in particular at sites where there is ethnic and cultural diversity.