



## Maine School Administrative District No. 75

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### **M.S.A.D. No. 75 – English Language Development (ELD) Program Evaluation 2020-2021**

#### **Introduction**

It is the district's mission to ensure that the school community provides its students with the tools necessary to become "fluent learners, critical thinkers and creative contributors to our society." This document represents the results of a thorough analysis of the English Language Development program in the district. The review was designed to evaluate whether or not the program is meeting the needs of its population and is providing opportunities that encourage the success of all learners stated in the district's mission. This report will identify strengths and weaknesses of the program in order to facilitate ongoing improvement.

#### **Context**

In general terms, an English learner (EL) is a student whose primary language is one other than English. A student is identified as an EL after administering an initial language screening and follow-up evaluation and it is determined that the student is not fully proficient in English. The district typically provides English language instruction and support to 15-20 K-12 English learners each year. Of those students, there are many different languages and cultures represented. This year, for example, there are nine different first languages represented among the English learner population. The span in their ages is as varied as their backgrounds and needs; these elements compound to create unique educational programming, designed for the individual learner.

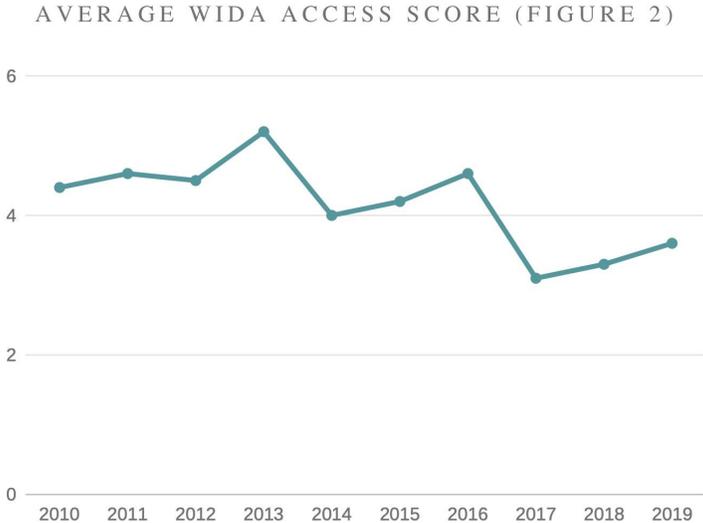
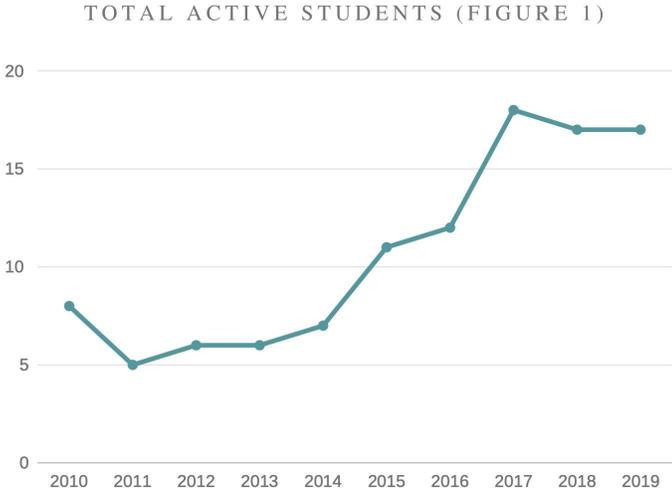
Under civil rights law, all schools are required to ensure that ELs have equitable access to the education they provide. Regardless of what language a family speaks, it is the school's responsibility to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to be fully active participants in the academic and social programs at the school, and that all parents or guardians are fully informed. These legal guidelines are addressed in the district's Lau Plan.

**EL Population**

As shown in Figure 1, the number of active students on the ELD roster has grown over the past decade. In addition to growing in size, this population has grown in relative need.

There are two main reasons for this. First, the Maine DOE continues to lower the proficiency score on the WIDA Access Test at which students test out of the program (from 6.0 to 5.0 in 2016 and then from 5.0 to 4.5 in 2018).

Lowering the score means that more students are testing out of receiving services. Despite more students testing out, the number of students on the EL roster has grown since 2016, suggesting the total need is growing even faster than what is shown in the graph. Also, because the state has lowered the score at which students test out, the average test score of the students who remain on the list is also lower (shown in Figure 2). This means that students who remain on the list may require more services than in the past, as a student who scores higher on the test is generally able to navigate the mainstream curriculum more successfully.



The second reason for the growing needs of these students has to do with the complex challenges new Americans face on their pathways to academic success. Students who arrive as asylum seekers or refugees often require additional support to be successful at school. As the school is one of the only resources available to these students and their families in our area, the school must aid in breaking down a wide range of barriers related to information, language, financial need, prior academic preparation and familial responsibilities.

## **Current Staffing**

Currently, there are two ELD certified teachers for the K-12 program, both also teaching half-time Spanish. The current population of supported students is 17. Title IIA funding supports approximately \$6000 of the program's salaries, while the rest is locally funded.

Due to the diversity of not only the learners' needs and ages, but their geographic location as well, the two staff members spend the day traveling to the schools where the English learners are located. Both staff members also have teaching responsibilities in the middle and high school. Driving distance between schools as well as each school's unique daily schedule compound to make providing adequate English language services a challenge. For example, at the elementary level, many of the classrooms have a literacy block in the morning. However, if an English learner could benefit from services 3-4 days a week to focus on targeted language skills, the other learners in the district may not have access to the ELD staff during that crucial time when they are also in need. Equally challenging is the coordination of services with the high school's block schedule and the middle school's own unique schedule.

## **Program Overview**

### *District English Learners Receiving Services*

For the 2020-2021 school year, there are a total of 17 K-12 students in the district who require and have access to the services of the ELD program. The students make up a total of 8 different languages. The span in their ages is as diverse as their backgrounds and needs; these elements compound to create a unique educational program.

### *Lau Plan*

As per federal law, the ELD program follows the guidelines outlined in the district's Lau Plan. The Lau Plan outlines the referral process, assessment and evaluation instruments as well as programming.

The ELD teacher is responsible for ensuring that all English learners receiving services through the program have equal access to their education commensurate to their native speaking peers, as mandated by federal law. The initial evaluation and identification of learners, the programming and instruction, as well as the assessment and evaluation of growth of the English learners are all areas for which the ELD teacher is responsible. These procedures are outlined in the Lau Plan.

Identified English learners have access to supported classroom instruction as well as targeted English language instruction, based on individual linguistic needs. Over the last several years, the ELD and classroom teacher oversaw the paraprofessional for this program. The paraprofessional provided review and reinforcement of learning, based on the needs of the English learner. The Ed.Tech. helped administer the annual, federally-required assessment, helped maintain ELD records, supported the students in the classroom, and relayed observational information regarding students' classroom achievement on an ongoing basis. The position has remained open since January 2020. Furthermore, according to the State of Maine DOE's Priority Notice, the role that the paraprofessional filled for the program is one that is no longer recommended as it does not provide adequate services to the students.

### *Non-Instructional Services*

The English Language Development teacher is also responsible for providing support to the parents and guardians of English learners. For instance, the ELD teacher ensures that parents are able to communicate with teachers by arranging for a language interpreter to attend meetings and relays important school information to the families. This guarantees that pertinent information regarding their son's/daughter's education is being communicated accurately. At the high school level, an added responsibility of the ELD teacher is to help assist with students and families related to post-secondary plans. Depending on the family's knowledge of the college application and FAFSA process, the ELD teacher helps provide information and directs them to the appropriate resources to guide them in their plans after high school. In some situations, a language interpreter is hired to assist in parents accessing information about their children's education.

Another facet of the English Language Development program is the augmentation of diversity education district-wide. Utilizing the unique experiences and backgrounds of the English learners and their families, the ELD teacher provides learning opportunities for many M.S.A.D. No. 75 students. In the past, Chinese students and parents have given presentations on Chinese New Year, Burundian immigrants shared the differences between their former homes and life in Maine, and exchange students have presented about their home country in several schools. By increasing the cultural awareness in the school community, the ELD program is providing an integral educational service to all district students.

### *Identification, Instruction and Assessment*

As outlined in the Lau Plan, the ELD teacher reviews the Home Language Survey of all students entering the district and administers the WIDA Screener to students whose primary language is not English as indicated on the Survey. In addition to the results of the WIDA Screener, prior school records as well as parent and teacher reports are all components of identification and acceptance into the English Language Development program.

Due to the unique strengths and needs of the individual learners, their instructional program is customized to provide optimum support and instruction. For example, a middle school student who is at the "Developing Level 3" English language acquisition level may have instruction 2-3 times a week during the school's "target" time; or, the ELD time may occur during one or more content area times, depending on the individual student's needs.

The state's adoption of the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs: English Language Proficiency Test and its correlative English Language Proficiency Standards allow for the development of individualized instruction that promotes academic English language proficiency. Since academic English language proficiency is tied to academic achievement, direct English language instruction in this district is based on the content skills and objectives of the grade level content area/course in which the student is enrolled.

All English learners participate in Maine's and M.S.A.D. No. 75's standardized testing, with the exception of the newly arrived; students who have recently arrived in the country are exempt from standardized English Language Arts testing for one year only. In addition to the regular district and statewide assessments required of all students, WIDA's ACCESS for ELLs: English

Language Proficiency Test will be administered to all learners coded as “Limited English Proficient.” The term Limited English Proficient is an identifier used at the state level for coding purposes to identify students who have not attained the score of *4.5: Reaching Fluency*, as measured by the ACCESS. When an English learner achieves a score of 4.5, they are then placed on monitor status for two years, during which time the ELD teacher continues to ensure classroom achievement. At the conclusion of two years on monitor status and barring any discrepancies in the student’s continued success in the regular educational setting, the English learner is officially exited from the program.

### **Guidance from the Maine DOE**

Earlier this year, after receiving clarification from the US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR), the Maine DOE issued a Priority Notice regarding staffing and services for English Language Learners. The notice states that not following the guidelines may violate students’ civil rights. The first three guidelines in this notice highlighted some of the challenges the ELD program faces in the district.

First, the “consultation model,” where teachers without an ESOL endorsement provide ESOL services in consultation with an ESOL-endorsed teacher, should no longer be used -- any student who qualifies for ESOL services must receive those services directly from an ESOL-endorsed teacher. However, the “consultation model” continues to be used as a necessary stopgap for the ELD department in our district.

Second, they gave recommended amounts of time per day EL students should spend with an ESOL-endorsed teacher based on their tested proficiency level (minimum two periods per day for proficiency levels one and two and one period per day for proficiency levels above two). Again, it is not currently possible to meet these minimums in our district.

Third, paraprofessionals can no longer provide core ESOL services, even under the supervision of an ESL-endorsed teacher. Given the demands of the department, the paraprofessional had been providing those services for the past few years. According to the new guidelines this should only be used as an interim measure and the district should seek to hire a qualified teacher for this role.

While the EL population in the district has been growing in size and need, these new guidelines are the primary reason for the additional staffing requested in the following section. As the notice from the DOE states, "We recognize that the guidance we have received may have financial and programmatic implications for School Administrative Units (SAUs), and encourage SAUs to carefully review existing Lau Plans, and revise accordingly."

## Findings and Proposals

### **Programming/Preparation:**

WIDA ACCESS data confirms that the ELD program in M.S.A.D. No. 75 is successful for most students. On the whole, the English learners who currently receive or had received ELD services moved quickly through the program and are finding success in their mainstream classes. Many former ELs continue to make use of the non-instructional services available in order to maintain their success in their mainstream classes and beyond.

In order to best meet the needs of the district's diverse English learners, the ELD team must provide the necessary instruction and support, as well as key non-instructional supports that impact the students' capacity for academic success.

The district's Lau Plan should reflect the changes the state made to the WIDA ACCESS cut-off score for services. The Lau Plan must align to the state's lowering of the overall proficiency level of 4.5. Also, the plan should be updated to include more clarity of the non-instructional programming that is needed to ensure success of the learners.

**Proposal:** Update the existing Lau Plan to reflect the changes made to the WIDA identification of English learners as those who score below a 4.5 on the ACCESS. In addition, outline the non-instructional planning that occurs to ensure English learner success.

### **Staffing**

The ELD program is staffed by two half-time ELD teachers; these two teachers also teach half-time Spanish. Due to the varied needs of the population and the overall age span of the students receiving services, and to align the program to the State Guidelines as presented in the Priority Notice, staffing should be adjusted appropriately.

**Proposal:** Add one district-wide ELD teaching position, for a total of two full-time positions in the department.

### **Professional Learning**

The ELD program should provide more awareness of the district's multilingual students and an overview of best classroom practices. Regardless of whether or not they have had an English learner in their classroom, the district's staff should have a basic understanding of the program, its purpose, and the resources available to them.

**Proposal:** Offer professional learning opportunities throughout the year to school staff, which would provide an increased understanding of students' needs as well as the services available to them.

### ***Next Steps***

- Revise the Lau Plan
- Hire a full-time certified ESL teacher
- Design professional development opportunities for staff

***Appendices***

Home Language Survey

M.S.A.D. No. 75 Lau Plan

Maine DOE Priority Notice

***Evaluation Team Membership***

Peggy Callahan, ELD and Spanish Teacher, Mt. Ararat High School

Max Conover, ELD and Spanish Teacher, Mt. Ararat Middle and High Schools

Corrie Calderwood, English Teacher, Mt. Ararat High School

Marie Dickson, Special Education Teacher, Harpswell Community School

Amanda Hersey, Assistant Superintendent

Randa Rineer, Principal, Williams Cone Elementary School

Josh Ottow, former Principal, Mt. Ararat Middle School