



# **FROM BLUEPRINT TO BUILDING: LIFTING THE TORCH FOR MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS IN NEW YORK STATE**

New York, the Empire State, has long held special salience in the imagination of newcomers to the United States. The Big Apple, New York City, particularly stands out as a quintessential immigrant city, a cosmopolitan epicenter of North American power and historic entrypoint into the country. In fact, over three million foreign-born residents currently live in the City, and *half* of all residents speak a language other than English at home. But this international diversity is not limited to the City's five boroughs of 8.5 million residents. The number of newcomers to upstate and Long Island communities has spiked in recent decades. Around 30 percent of families across New York State now speak a language other than English at home, resulting in 240,000 English language learners (ELLs) in the state's K–12 schools who speak nearly 200 different languages.

Recently, in response to this long-standing, yet still-growing, multilingual population, New York State has led a bullish, state-level redesign of policies and practices to better support the education of its ELLs. Persistent ELL academic achievement gaps, the heightened rigor of Common Core State Standards, and federal monitoring have prompted state leaders to rethink their approach to ELL services in a more comprehensive way.

In April 2014, with then-State Commissioner John B. King, Jr. (now U.S. Secretary of Education) at the helm, the New York State Department of Education released a sweeping set of priorities for raising ELL achievement. Its new strategy, named *The Blueprint for ELL Success* and derived from several years of stakeholder engagement, aims to support content-integrated and bilingual instruction for ELLs, professional development for all teachers, family engagement, early learning, and more. That September, the State Board of Regents formally codified many of these ideas through changes to the state's administrative rules governing ELL policy, Commissioner's Regulations (CR) Part 154. In addition, a chain of bilingual, ELL leaders were recently elected or appointed to top education posts within the state's administration, further energizing the execution of new policies.

In concert with the new Blueprint and regulation, the state also recently rolled out a robust set of other ELL-focused initiatives, including updated language development standards, redevelopment of the statewide exam measuring students' English levels, the Seal of Biliteracy for high school graduates, translations of the freely accessible and openly licensed math curriculum into five languages, and a variety of other high-profile resources to foster ELL family engagement.

## Overview of New York’s ELL Policy Reform: Key Changes for Elementary School ELLs

Area	Major Change
ELL Identification and Exit	<p><b>Identification:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A qualified “pedagogue” must administer the identification process. This person is defined as a bilingual or English as a New Language (ENL) teacher, or a teacher trained in cultural competency, language development, and ELL needs.</li> <li>• Schools must conduct a review—at parent or teacher request—to address possible ELL misidentification within first 45 days of a student’s enrollment.</li> </ul> <p><b>Exit Criteria:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students can exit ELL status by scoring at the “commanding” level on the English language proficiency test <i>or</i> scoring at the “expanding” level and at or above grade level on the grade 3–8 academic reading tests. Formerly, only performance on English language proficiency tests was considered.</li> </ul> <p><b>Students with Disabilities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For initial identification, a language proficiency team—minimally comprised of a school or district administrator, ENL/bilingual teacher, director of special education, and parent or guardian—will administer a seven-step protocol to determine if “the student’s disability is the determinant factor affecting whether the student can demonstrate proficiency in English.”</li> <li>• The school’s committee on special education will annually determine if an ELL with a learning disability should retain ELL designation based on assessment data.</li> </ul>
Family Engagement	<p>Staff must meet with parents or guardians, in addition to regularly required conferences for all students, to discuss English learning progress at least once a year. Schools must keep record of family’s preferred language and conduct all communication in that language.</p>
Instructional Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>English as New Language [ENL], formerly English as a Second Language [ESL]:</b> ELLs must receive ENL instruction through two settings: “integrated” [ENL methodologies in content area instruction either by co-teaching <i>or</i> individual teaching by dually certified teacher in the classroom] and stand-alone [traditional “pull-out” ENL instruction by an ENL teacher]. Previously, ENL instruction was taught through a stand-alone model only. Now, the balance of integrated and stand-alone services must be tailored to language abilities and needs.</li> <li>• <b>Bilingual Education:</b> If a <i>district</i> enrolls 20 or more ELLs of the same grade level who speak the same home language, it must create districtwide bilingual education programs to serve them. As per former regulations, individual <i>schools</i> with twenty or more such students are still required to open a program on site. In addition, for ELLs at “entering” or “emerging” English levels, a minimum of two content areas now must be taught in the home language.</li> <li>• <b>Grade Span:</b> The maximum allowable grade span to group students in ENL or bilingual programs is two contiguous grades to avoid inappropriately grouping ELLs at different ages.</li> <li>• <b>Former ELLs:</b> School districts must provide at least two years of instructional language services after students have exited ELL status.</li> </ul>

Area	Major Change
Professional Development	Districts must provide professional development (PD) on ELL needs, co-teaching strategies, and integration of language and content. This must amount to 15 percent of all PD hours for general educators and 50 percent for bilingual/ENL teachers. Former rules did not require percentages and specific content.
District Planning and Reporting	Districts must report additional program information to the state on grade level, home language, and program type for six ELL subpopulations: newcomer, developing, long-term, and former language learners, as well as those with inconsistent/interrupted formal education (SIFE) and learning disabilities. A summary of annual English proficiency and reading and math test outcomes must be reported to the state by subpopulation and grade level as well.

Abbreviated and adapted from Commissioner’s Regulation Subpart 154-1 and 154-2, “Services for Pupils with Limited English Proficiency,” <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/biling/docs/CRPart154.pdf>; Commissioner’s Regulation Subpart 154-3, “Proposed Addition of Subpart 154-3 of the Commissioner’s Regulations,” <http://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/914p12d8.pdf>.

## Blueprint for English Language Learner Success Principles

1. All teachers are teachers of ELLs, and need to plan accordingly.
2. All school boards and district/school leaders are responsible for ensuring that the ELL academic, linguistic, social, and emotional needs of ELLs are addressed.
3. Districts and schools should engage all ELLs in instruction that is grade- appropriate, academically rigorous, and aligned with the New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core and P-12 Common Core Learning Standards.
4. Districts and schools should recognize that bilingualism and biliteracy are assets, and provide opportunities for all students to earn a Seal of Biliteracy upon obtaining a high school diploma by providing all students.
5. Districts and schools should value all ELL parents and families of ELLs as partners in education and effectively involve them in the education of their children.
6. District and school communities should leverage the expertise of Bilingual, ESL, and Languages Other Than English (LOTE) teachers and support personnel while increasing their professional capacities.
7. Districts and school communities should leverage ELLs’ home languages, cultural assets, and prior knowledge.
8. Districts and schools should use diagnostic tools and formative assessment practices in order to measure ELL content knowledge as well as new and home language development to inform instruction.

Source: Office of Bilingual Education and Foreign Language Studies, *Blueprint for English Language Learners (ELLs)*

# RECOMMENDATIONS

---

**1. Develop and communicate a high-profile ELL vision at the state level.** While vision-setting is only a starting point, it serves as a critical anchor of reform, a reference point for stakeholders at all systems levels. The Blueprint for ELL Success provided a foundation for explaining reforms and capturing the spirit behind new mandates. The Blueprint’s principles have begun to trickle down and encourage shifts in ideas about ELLs at the local level.

**2. Design policies that incorporate home language as an asset through dual immersion models.** Dual immersion instruction can close academic achievement gaps in English while simultaneously growing bilingualism in order to enhance college and career opportunities. New York is making significant investments in its linguistic assets through expanding district-level mandates for bilingual instruction, incorporating home language into new, content-aligned language development standards, translating openly licensed and freely accessible math curriculum into five languages, providing grant-based funding for districts to start new bilingual programs, and creating a pathway for high school graduates to earn a Seal of Biliteracy on their diplomas.

**3. Design policies that integrate language development and academic instruction across the board.** New York’s new policies push towards more inclusive, “integrated” instructional models, primarily through co-teaching models where content teachers and ELL specialists work together to provide linguistic supports during mainstream instruction. The rules set differentiated expectations by English proficiency level to meet ELL needs through a hybrid of stand-alone and integrated language services, setting a baseline that allows for flexibility in local decision-making. The reforms also set specific requirements for all teachers, mainstream and ELL specialists alike, to receive professional development to integrate language and content instruction.

**4. Build statewide systems to develop administrator and teacher competencies with ELLs, equipping them for success in meeting and exceeding regulatory expectations.** While districts and schools control the specifics of how new policies take root, New York has established various mechanisms for capacity building and resource sharing. In particular, the state education department developed a free Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) to guide district leaders in implementation of the new regulations and Blueprint principles. Moreover, the state’s system of eight Regional Bilingual Education Resource Networks (RBERNs) has helped disseminate information and connect educators to professional development opportunities and resources across the state. But, even with these supports, several educators voiced concerns over a lack of sufficient state guidance on implementation of changes. An incremental roll-out of reforms, with piloting or prototyping in certain locations, could have smoothed district transitions to the new policies and practices.

**5. Coordinate administrative action with institutions of higher education and state government to ensure policies can be implemented optimally.** New York’s new rules have exacerbated a shortage of bilingual and ELL teachers; demand has outpaced supply. To address this issue, NYSED has created “fast track” alternative certification options and engaged schools of education proactively, expanding the number of university partners under its existing Intensive Teacher Institute in Bilingual Education (ITI-BE) tuition assistance program. However, the department has gotten little assistance from the state legislature on new initiatives. The legislature should consider passing additional, dedicated funding for ITI-BE and to help offset district costs for hiring more ELL teachers.

**6. Create policies that collect more meaningful ELL data to evaluate the impact of reforms, and share that information in publicly accessible ways.** New York’s new policies require all districts to report more detailed data by instructional program and specific ELL subgroup, including newcomer, developing, long-term, and former categories as well as those with disabilities and/or interrupted formal education. With increased ELL data reporting requirements under the newest federal education law, ESSA, New York State provides an example of thoughtful data disaggregation that allows for clearer tracking of ELLs over time and more careful work on how instructional program differences affected academic outcomes. In the short term, education officials should invest in interim measurement and data-gathering tools to measure progress beyond “inputs,” such as teacher hires and district plans.

## About the Author

**Janie Tankard Carnock** is a program associate with the Education Policy program at New America. She is a member of the Dual Language Learners National Work Group, where she provides research and analysis on policies impacting dual language learners. Before joining New America, she taught elementary school in Baltimore City.

**Note: This is a summary of a longer piece. To read the entire paper, visit:**  
<https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/policy-papers/blueprint-building/>