

# English Learners Face Severe Inequities and Substandard Conditions in NJ Schools, Report by the Consortium, NJTESOL/NJBE, and Education Law Center Finds

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*Crucial new report finds ability to learn was compromised at a time when English learners needed even more support*

**November 16, 2021** – English learners (ELs) 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 report released today by the NJ Consortium for Immigrant Children (NJCIC), NJ Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages/NJ Bilingual Educators (NJTESOL/NBE), and Education Law Center (ELC).

The report relies on an in-depth survey of 80 ESL/bilingual educators, administrators and counselors among NJTESOL/NBE's membership, supplemented with follow-up interviews, as well as listening sessions with parents, caregivers and youth conducted between April and July 2021.

The organizations, which had received reports about a lack of services for English learners and their families during the pandemic, hoped to better understand the accommodations English learners were offered before and during this period of disruption for students and families.

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

- Over one-third of educators who responded to the survey 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 ELs 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 EL students;
- Twenty-six percent of respondents reported no attendance recovery policy at their school, and more reported that their school had failed to communicate their policy to ELs. At some schools, ELs are dropping out in high numbers, with one educator reporting 180 dropouts in her district during the pandemic.

“Disturbing responses to our survey ranged from hungry children not receiving meals because non-English speaking parents didn’t know closed schools were still giving out food to the concern that ELs are simply invisible in the system,” said Kathleen Fernandez, NJTESOL/NJBE Executive Director. “The pandemic certainly created new challenges, but some parents said they felt EL services were always second-tier.”

NJCIC, ELC and NJTESOL/NJBE have previously called on state lawmakers to direct funds to English learners. In June 2021, NJTESOL/NJBE organized a letter-writing campaign to encourage the NJ Department of Education to make changes to the NJ State Plan submitted to the federal government for funding from the American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ARP ESSER) because it did not prioritize English learners. NJCIC also provided brief testimony to the NJ Department of Human Services on July 28, urging the state to use part of ARP funding to provide additional services for English learners.

Based on the data collected, the organizations are calling on the NJ Department of Education, the State Legislature, and the Murphy Administration to take the following steps:

- 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, and create a “complaint investigation” system to react to reports of violations;
- Provide culturally appropriate, bilingual, mental health and counseling services to help English learners cope with the effects of the pandemic and other life stressors.

“Our report makes clear that we are far from doing all we can to provide ELs with the supports they need to be successful in school,” said Emily Chertoff, Director of the NJ Consortium for Immigrant Children. “The pandemic has shined a bright light on that while also making the situation worse.”

“Our goal is to help educators and policymakers understand what the relevant law is, that every school must follow it in every district, and that legal requirements must be bolstered to guarantee ELs the kind of education that can make us all proud,” said Jessica Levin, Education Law Center Senior Attorney. “While this moment has exposed vulnerabilities, New Jersey has a chance to be a nationwide leader on education equity by implementing the recommendations in this important report.”

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