

## HIGHLIGHTING STRATEGIES FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

## More training for teachers to help English learners in Los Angeles

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**F**ourth and fifth grade is a crucial time for students who are learning English in addition to their home language. Teachers in Los Angeles Unified will soon get specialized training to help those students succeed.

Loyola Marymount University's Center for Equity for English Learners is partnering with Los Angeles Unified School District and the organization SEAL on the new project, funded by a \$3 million National Professional Development grant from the federal government.

Lydia Acosta Stephens, executive director of Los Angeles Unified's Multilingual and Multicultural Education Department, said the new project is exciting because children who

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Those students are at risk of becoming long-term English learners, defined as students who have been enrolled in school in the U.S. for more than six years but who have not yet achieved full academic fluency in English. Those who are still learning English in middle and high school often struggle to access academic content in other subjects.

“Every time we have a long-term English learner, I feel I’m responsible for that because I haven’t figured out what to give the school, the teacher or the family,” Acosta Stephens said. “Each of these kiddos is, as my mom would say, a *tesoro*, a treasure, and I haven’t figured out how to let everybody see the diamond inside.”

The official name of the new L.A. Unified program is the Purposeful Engagement in Academic Rigor and Language Learning Project. It aims to increase the use of research-based strategies in fourth and fifth grade classrooms, engage families and increase the number of new bilingual teachers.

The opportunity to train more fourth and fifth grade teachers and at the same time research outcomes will allow the district to understand better how to serve children who are taking longer to become fluent in English, Acosta Stephens said.

“For me, it’s what have we missed in servicing that child to provide them the opportunity to reclassify — if it’s language and literacy holding them back, or social-emotional, self-confidence,” Acosta Stephens said.

organization that works with districts across California to train teachers and develop language-rich curriculum to help English learners succeed academically. The model focuses on oral language, getting students to talk out loud, and academic language, using complex vocabulary. In addition, the organization emphasizes the importance of partnering with families, offering workshops for parents on how to help support literacy at home.

“We know from the research that an emphasis on oral language development and academic discourse supports students’ work and achievement across content areas,” said Elvira Armas, director of programs and partnerships at the Center for Equity for English Learners at Loyola Marymount University. The center is in charge of researching the project’s outcomes. Armas said that includes teachers’ classroom observations, surveys answered by teachers and principals, focus groups made up of families and student data, like test scores in math and English and in English proficiency. The new grant will also allow the researchers to be able to compare outcomes in schools that have already been part of the previous TK-third grade program with other schools where only fourth and fifth grade teachers are receiving training.

Teachers in SEAL programs not only receive training but also coaching and opportunities to share with each other.

“Good training is important, but that’s not where teacher change and implementation happens. It happens back at the site where teachers plan, try the thing they planned and then reflect on it, modify it,” said Anya Hurwitz, director of SEAL.

Acosta Stephens said the schools implementing the SEAL model did well during distance learning. She said attendance was better at those schools, and teachers were better prepared to work with families, and to design language-rich curriculum that could work during distance learning.

“What we noticed post-pandemic, especially at one of our schools, is that kids did not fall back and have that learning loss as intensively,” Acosta Stephens said. “I think it has to do with teachers being really familiar with those strategies.”

offer professional development to fourth and fifth grade teachers at other schools. In total, the project will serve 166 current teachers and site leaders at 25 schools.

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In addition, the project aims to increase the number of teachers with bilingual authorizations. That’s crucial because districts so often [struggle to find](#) qualified bilingual teachers.

“For us, it’s huge,” Acosta Stephens said. “It’s not just in dual-language programs that we need it.” She pointed out that any teacher who works with children who speak a language other than English can benefit from bilingual training.

Under the grant, students in the teaching credential program at Loyola Marymount will be offered scholarships to complete the bilingual authorization. In addition, they will learn alongside the teachers who are already working in classrooms.

“Being able to offer a scholarship supports them in completing their program and reducing some of that hardship,” Armas said, “but most importantly it situates them in a community of practice with working teachers, as well as providing a community of support as they move into a bilingual teaching practice, so it really does provide a very robust experience.”

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