

## Address educational needs of English Language Learners

English Language Learners (ELL) students come from more than 400 different language and cultural backgrounds – some districts have more than 100 different language groups – but most ELL students are born in this country. ELL students are the fastest growing segment of the public school population and every school district, whether suburban, urban or rural, is affected. Over the past 15 years, the number of ELL students in the United States has nearly doubled—to about five million, with projections showing that by 2015, ELL enrollment will double again to 10 million. As of 2005-06, the most recent year for which data is available, Pennsylvania schools enrolled nearly 46,000 ELL students.<sup>1</sup>

### PSEA Recommendations

Implement and fund policies that support school districts' efforts to:

- Provide English as a Second Language (ESL) and bilingual education according to students' educational needs;
- Diagnose ELL students' learning needs, support their learning, and assess their progress;
- Provide ELL students who are eligible for special education with appropriate services; and
- Provide resources for improving accommodations for ELL students.

### Teach ESL according to educational need

The research<sup>2</sup> indicates that learning English (or any language) is a long-term process. PSEA believes there should be ESL and bilingual education according to educational need. The main goal of these programs should be to achieve English proficiency, as well as provide support in content areas and other disciplines for ELL and students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). Further, PSEA believes that educators must be involved in the development and implementation of programs to ensure the successful pursuit of the education of students, regardless of their native language; and also must have the support and resources needed from both state and local entities.

# The Power of a Great Education: PSEA's 20/20 Vision for the Future



PSEA recognizes that to close the achievement gap between ELL students and their peers, the education system needs to do a better job of diagnosing their learning needs, supporting their learning, and assessing their progress. We support providing higher-quality professional development and in-service training on addressing, diagnosing, and teaching ELL students.

Additionally, PSEA supports comprehensive accommodations that allow ELL students to demonstrate their academic knowledge. PSEA does not support relying on a single measure of academic achievement for making decisions about any student, especially ELL students. Standardized tests generally are not valid for ELL students, because they were constructed and normed for native language speakers and may not accurately gauge what ELL students know and are able to do.

(01/10)

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<sup>1</sup> [www.pde.state.pa.us](http://www.pde.state.pa.us)

<sup>2</sup> Genesee, F., Lindholm-Leary, C., Saunders, W.M. and Christian, D. (Eds.). (2006). Educating English Language Learners: A Synthesis of Research Evidence. New York: Cambridge University Press.