

the Sillerman Center

FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF PHILANTHROPY

ADULT ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER PROGRAMS: A Guide to High Impact Investments



Over 23 million U.S. adults* lack sufficient English language proficiency. ELL programs are provided by federal level, state level, private, non-profit, or volunteer agencies. While approximately 1.2 million adults are enrolled in ELL programs, only 44% demonstrate progress.** As Luis Marquez, former CEO of PUENTE in L.A. explains, “If you can’t speak the language, you can’t find jobs except the poorest paying ones. [This] leads to family instability.”

The landscape of adult ELL instruction is multifaceted. Federal, state, local, and private funding help subsidize adult ELL programs. Unfortunately, there is a lack of research, evaluation, and accountability for student progress. Private funding can help ensure engaging and successful programs. Funders should also check if their town or city has an Office for New Americans and work collaboratively with them if possible.

English Language Learners: Program Considerations

English language learning is directly tied to employment and mobility, fulfilling parental responsibilities, and civic participation. However, there are significant barriers to adults obtaining English language proficiency. ELLs must negotiate language and culture on a daily basis. Programs should advocate for students and their families.

ADULT ELL PROGRAMS

- Life skills and general ESL
- Family literacy programs
- English literacy/civics
- Vocational ESL
- Teach self advocacy
- Workplace ESL classes

BARRIERS

- Lack of multi-level classes
- Class availability
- Teacher preparation
- Research on adult ELL learning and methods
- Waiting lists

NEEDS

- Success metrics
- Student and organization accountability
- Flexibility
- Diverse instruction

Factors to consider: schedules, family responsibilities, documentation status, ELL opportunities, motivation, effectiveness of instruction, age, prior education, cultural values

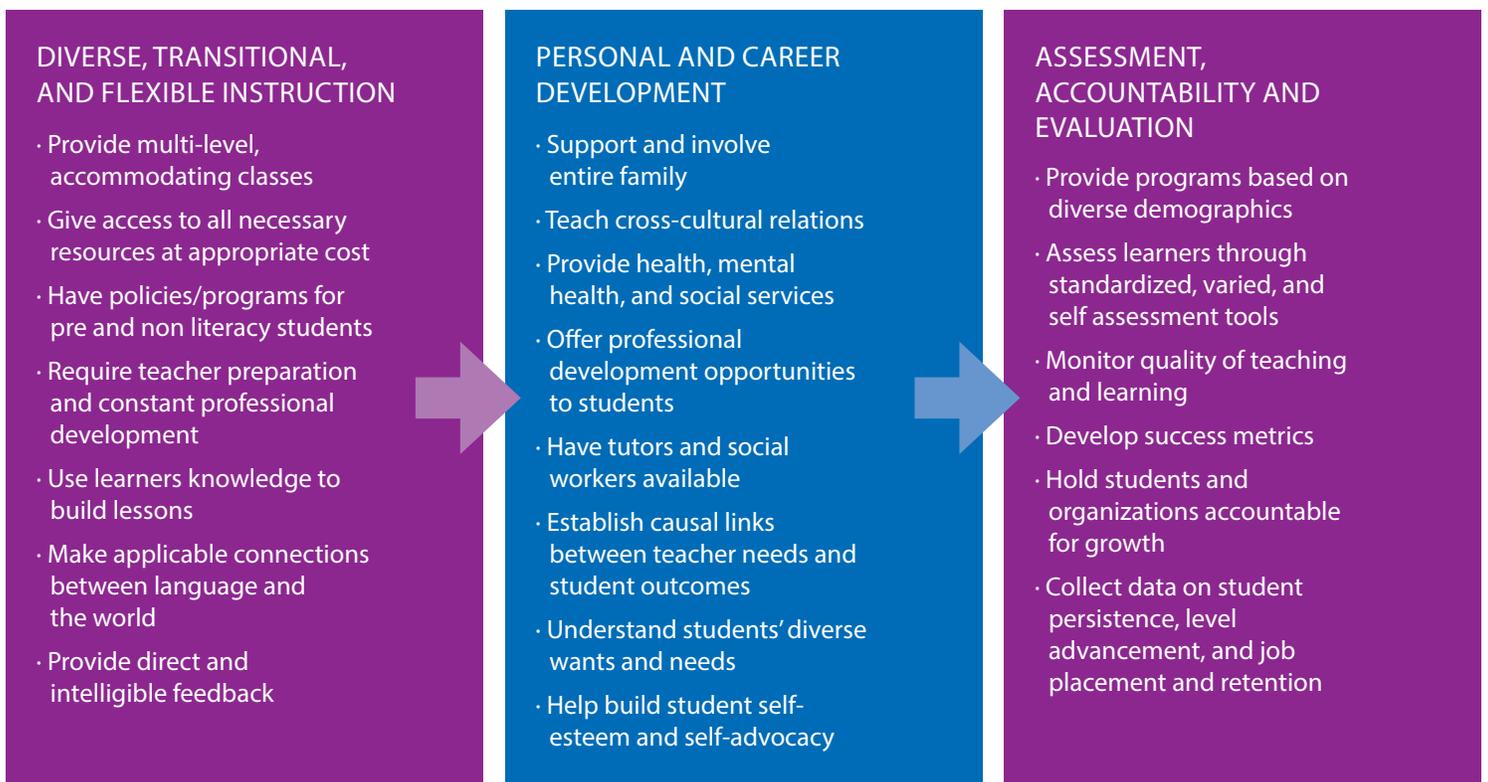
* According to the the 2009 *Adult English Language Learning* study by the Government Accountability Office, an adult ELL is an individual age 16 + who is not in secondary school and lacks English language skills. Please see this resource for information on funding as well.

** According to the 2013 *Lexington Institute Study*

What is a Strong Adult ESOL Program?

- RESPECTS AND ACKNOWLEDGES students' language of origin and culture, integrating personal experience into lessons
- INDIVIDUALIZES ELL learning plans, recognizing that there is no "one size fits all" model
- WORKS to address teacher preparation, lack of resources and multi-level learning
- BUILDS skills beyond the classroom to allow students to successfully enter the workforce and provide for themselves
- PROVIDES RIGOROUS SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE for the entire family's wellbeing and future
- COLLECTS DATA on student persistence, retention, level advancement, progress after student completes program

High Performing Programs Should:



While not all programs will successfully address each of these areas, high performing programs with appropriate funding should aim to focus on as many as possible. When programs are successful, adult ELLs should learn enough English to live a comfortable and full life without losing their native language or culture.

For more information please visit:

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