



HERE WE GO

Suzanne Bouffard

No matter our role, multilingual students are our students

More than 4.8 million students come to U.S. schools with a home language other than English. These students speak over 400 different languages and contribute an astounding diversity of life experiences to our classrooms.

Although California, Alaska, and the southwestern states are home to the most English learners, the five U.S. districts with the highest percentage of multilingual students include two in New Jersey. A Learning Forward member recently told us that 74 different languages are spoken in her Connecticut district.

No matter where we live or what role we play in education, multilingual students are our students. This is the case not just in the U.S., but also in Canada, Europe, and many other countries.

In this issue of *The Learning Professional*, experts call on all of us to work more intentionally and inclusively to meet English learners' needs. They remind us to learn *from* them and *with* them, not just teach *to* them.

A common theme shared by authors in this issue is the importance of collective responsibility for ensuring English learners' success. Featured experts highlight research showing that students learn best when language and content instruction are intertwined and instruction is made accessible to all students within mainstream classrooms.

They caution against using texts that are either dumbed down in



content or grade-inappropriate because they are intended for younger native speakers. They highlight the importance of inclusive hiring and training and supportive leadership.

The issue includes tools to help you evaluate whether your instructional materials are meeting English learners' needs (p. 62); reflection questions to help you consider your assumptions and biases about language and learning (p. 77); and recommended research you can use to improve your staff's knowledge, teaching, and assessment practices (p. 22).

A note about terminology: We have chosen to be consistent with the U.S. Department of Education's use of the term English learners. However, some authors in this issue explain

their reasons for using different terms, including multilingual students and emergent bilinguals.

Experts in the field use a variety of terms to refer to students who come to school more proficient in languages other than English, and many factors go into these decisions. Chief among them, in most cases, is the importance of valuing students' rich experiences, cultures, and funds of knowledge. Emphasizing students' assets is a perspective Learning Forward and this issue's authors share.

As equity is central to our mission at Learning Forward, meeting English learners' needs is a topic of ongoing importance that will not be confined to this issue of *The Learning Professional*. In upcoming issues, you will continue to see articles about how professional learning can support the teaching and learning of English learners.

A recent study shows teachers believe neither they nor their instructional materials are doing enough for students learning English. And less than a quarter of K-12 educators have engaged in professional learning focused on English learners in the past three years. Let's work together to help close that gap and make great teaching and learning accessible to everyone.

•
Suzanne Bouffard (suzanne.bouffard@learningforward.org) is editor of *The Learning Professional*. ■