

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro, Chair  
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations; House  
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health  
and Human Services, Education, and Related  
Services  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray, Chair  
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor and Pensions; Senate Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human  
Services, Education, and Related Services  
Washington, DC 20510

May 11, 2021

**Re: FY22 Appropriations Funding for English Learners / Title III**

We, the undersigned 122 organizations, are writing to urge you to include \$2 billion in FY22 appropriations funding for Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Title III is the federal formula grant program intended to support English learners (ELs) in every state and territory. Grants are based on each State’s share of EL students and recent immigrant student population. ELs make up 10% of K-12 public school students in the U.S. and are one of the fastest growing student populations. The number of ELs in the U.S. [grew 28.1%](#) between the 2000–01 school year and the 2016–17 school year.<sup>1</sup> As of 2017, there were more than 5 million English learners enrolled in public schools. While federal funding to support the education of ELs was first established in 1968 through the Bilingual Education Act, which later evolved into its current form of Title III in the 2002 reauthorization of the ESEA, funding has failed to keep up with the nation’s EL population growth.<sup>2</sup>

Research shows that ELs perform better when they have qualified teachers and high-quality learning materials (including digital curriculum), and their schools have adequate financial resources. Evidence indicates that these factors contribute to reducing opportunity gaps (e.g., low graduation rates, low college attendance rates, low enrollment in advanced placement classes). Despite the evidence, however, these resources are drastically lacking for English learners.

Coupled with the disparate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on high-need student populations, English learners in particular need additional targeted resources, ranging from tutoring, summer and after-school programs, and multilingual language development services to social and emotional support for challenges exacerbated by the pandemic. Local education agencies (LEAs) and state education agencies (SEAs) require not only additional funding for these services, but also expert technical assistance for ELs and general guidance from the U.S. Department of Education.

In a recent [survey by Next 100](#), two-thirds of educators report that their English learner students are not doing well or are only doing slightly well academically. More than half of survey respondents report that only a few or some of their EL students have the technology they need to participate in online learning, and 72% state that only a few or some of their EL students have reliable or stable Internet access—lacking essential tools to access, let alone meaningfully participate in, online learning.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition, *English Learners: Demographic Trends* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Leslie Villegas and Amaya Garcia, *A Federal Policy Agenda for English Learner Education* (Washington, DC: New America, 2021).

Adequate funding is crucial for English learner success, yet funding has been relatively flat since the inception of Title III in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002, fluctuating between \$664 million in 2002 and \$737 million in 2019. In 2002, Title III was authorized to provide \$750 million for the academic and linguistic education of ELs. The subsequent ESEA reauthorization—the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015—authorized Title III funding to increase to \$884 million by 2020. The most recent Consolidated Appropriations Act for FY21 provided \$797 million for Title III, the highest funding level appropriated to date, but still short of ESSA’s authorized amount. Even if Congress had funded Title III at the authorized level of \$884,959,633, this would have provided schools with only \$177 per pupil for the 5 million English learners enrolled in U.S. public schools. Even more concerning is that when adjusting for inflation, Title III funding has decreased by 12.3% since 2010.<sup>3</sup> In FY08, Title III was funded at \$730 million – which is roughly \$900 million in 2021 dollars. The population of ELs has increased by more than 25%<sup>4</sup> since then, and Title III is funded at roughly 70% of the per-pupil level of 2008.

The lack of adequate Title III funding in the federal budget has had a disproportionate impact on students of color, low-income students, immigrant families, and students with disabilities. The majority of EL students is Latino—77%—followed by 11% Asian and 4% Black.<sup>5</sup> Nearly 60% of ELs live in households where income levels are less than 185% of the federal poverty level, and nearly 14% (700,000) are also identified as students with disabilities.

Not only has the EL population grown, but it is increasingly more linguistically and culturally diverse as suburban, exurban, and rural districts have seen dramatic increases in their EL populations. While increasing numbers of late-entrant students, students with interrupted education, and refugee children are enrolling in schools, it is important to note that most EL students are U.S.-born citizens.

As stated in a recent [The 74 op-ed](#) by UnidosUS, SchoolHouse Connection, and National Center for Learning Disabilities, “For students facing the greatest barriers to school success and long-term stability, the passage of the American Rescue Plan Act was a positive step forward. Yet, even with these dedicated funds, there are still significant unmet needs for underserved children, such as English learners, who comprise 10 percent of K-12 students.” It is important to note that in ensuring equitable distribution of resources, Title I funds are intended to provide support to all low-income students including ELs, and Title III funds should serve to supplement Title I in supporting ELs.

Increasing Title III funding would help to rectify years of underinvestment and provide for more equitable funding for one of the highest-need student populations. Should Title III funding continue to fail to reflect the rate of EL growth, millions of students will continue to be denied a high-quality education and will be inhibited from reaching their potential and maximizing their contributions to the United States’ economy. As noted in the congressionally requested report from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences’ Commission on Language Learning—*America’s Languages, Investing in*

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<sup>3</sup> UnidosUS calculation based on Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI inflation calculator and U.S. Department of Education and NCES data.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition, *English Learners: Demographic Trends* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, *English Learners in Public Schools* (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

*Language Learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*—as a country the United States needs bilingual and biliterate citizens for national security, to promote economic growth, and to advance social justice.<sup>6</sup>

In order to improve the academic progress and meet the social and emotional needs of EL students, we make the following recommendations for Congress:

- **Appropriate \$2 billion for Title III in the FY22 federal budget.** Funding Title III at this level would provide increased school supports to \$400/per pupil, as well as resources in other key areas, including:
  - \$100 million to create a discretionary grant program for the development and adoption of native language assessments to leverage the full repertoire of linguistic, cultural and cognitive resources that English learners bring to school and to better inform equitable and higher-level instruction.
  - Professional development for teachers of ELs.
  - Pre-service support for teacher preparation programs.
  - Culturally and linguistically responsive engagement and communication with EL families.
  - Community and family initiatives to support after-school academic and social programs for English learners.
  - Sustainable innovative programs that support bilingual and dual language education and leverage the unique linguistic, cultural, and cognitive capital of English learners to promote higher levels of academic and socio-emotional outcomes.
- **Reassign administration of the Title III formula grants program to the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA).** Years ago, Title III was moved from OELA to the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) to provide greater coordination of assessments and accountability between Title I and Title III. However, the bifurcation of this system was addressed in 2015 with the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act, which moved assessment and accountability for ELs to Title I. Still, states rely on federal technical assistance in crafting and administering their state and local plans under Title III of the ESEA and need timely, accurate guidance. OELA already disseminates research and resources for teaching ELs and has the expertise needed to provide critical technical assistance to states. If properly resourced to meet staffing needs, OELA would be well positioned to provide this guidance and ensure Title III program quality.
- **Rename the Office of English Language Acquisition to move from deficit to asset-based language that recognizes the strengths that ELs bring to the learning environment.** The name of the office was last amended in 2002 and would require amending [Section 1072\(b\)](#) of the Department of Education Organization Act.<sup>7</sup> Some options to consider include: Office of Multilingual Education and Support, Office of Bilingual Education, Office of Multilingual Support, and Office of Bilingual Education and Multilingual Support.

The undersigned organizations respectfully urge you to consider the recommendations outlined above. We are committed to supporting English learners—our nation’s future—to ensure that they have access to a high-quality education. Our prosperity as a nation beyond the pandemic depends on their success. Should you have any questions, please contact Amalia Chamorro, Director of the Education Policy

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<sup>6</sup> American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Commission on Language Learning, *America’s Languages, Investing in Language Learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Cambridge, MA: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2017.)

<sup>7</sup> Pub. L. 107–110, title X, § 1072(b), (c)(2)(A), (d), Jan. 8, 2002, 115 Stat. 2089.

Project, UnidosUS at [achamorro@unidosus.org](mailto:achamorro@unidosus.org) and Dr. Bill Rivers, Policy Advisor, National Association for Bilingual Education at [william.p.rivers@gmail.com](mailto:william.p.rivers@gmail.com).

Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors (CA)  
Acero Schools (IL)  
Acero Schools Chicago (IL)  
ACTFL (VA)  
Aliento Education Fund (AZ)  
ALL In Education (AZ)  
Alliance For a Better Community (CA)  
Alliance for Excellent Education  
American Federation of Teachers  
Amethod Public Schools (CA)  
Arizona Department of Education (Kathy Hoffman, State Superintendent)  
Arizona School Boards Association  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles (CA)  
Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents - ALAS  
Association of Mexican American Education (CA)  
BellXcel  
Breakthrough Central Texas (TX)  
Brighton Park Neighborhood Council (IL)  
Californians Together (CA)  
Camino Nuevo Charter Academy (CA)  
Canal Alliance (CA)  
Carlos Rosario International Public School (DC)  
CATESOL - California Teacher of English as a Second Language (CA)  
Center for Applied Linguistics - CAL  
Center for Equity for English Learners (CA)  
Center for Powerful Public Schools (CA)  
Centro Hispano Daniel Torres Inc. (PA)  
Chicano Federation (TX)  
Children Now (CA)  
Children's Action Alliance (AZ)  
Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles (CA)  
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues (DC)  
CLLARO (CO)  
Coleman Advocates for Children & Youth (CA)  
Collaborative for Student Success  
Community Voices for Public Education (TX)  
Conexión Américas (TN)  
Corporación Desarrollo Económico, Vivienda y Salud - CODEVys (PR)  
Council of Administrators of Special Education  
Dominico-American Society of Queens (NY)  
Dr. Emiliano Gonzalez (Chair, Teaching & Learning, University of St. Thomas-Houston)  
East Bay Spanish Speaking Citizens' Foundation (CA)

Eastmont Community Center (CA)  
EDGE Consulting Partners (VA)  
Edu-Futuro (VA)  
Education Law Center (PA)  
Education Reform Now  
El Centro, Inc. (KS)  
El Centro de la Raza (WA)  
El Programa Hispano Catolico (OR)  
El Sol Science and Arts Academy (CA)  
Encuentro (NM)  
English Learners Success Forum (DC)  
Ezperanza, Inc. (OH)  
Friendly House Inc. (AZ)  
Gads Hill Center (IL)  
GEMAS Consulting and Advocacy (CA)  
Greater Lawrence Community Action Council (MA)  
Green Dot Public Schools (CA/TN)  
Hispanic Federation (NY)  
Hispanic Services Council (FL)  
Hispanic Unity of Florida, Inc. (FL)  
HOLA Ohio (OH)  
HOPE (Hispanas Organized for Political Equality) (CA)  
I-LEAD INC. (PA)  
Ibero-American Action League (NY)  
IDEA Public Schools (TX/LA)  
Instituto del Progreso Latino (IL)  
Intercultural Development Research Association - IDRA  
Joint National Committee for Languages - JNCL  
Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)  
KIPP  
KIPP SoCal Public Schools (CA)  
La Causa, Inc. (WI)  
La Maestra Family Clinic (CA)  
La Union del Pueblo Entero - LUPE (TX)  
Latino Community Center (PA)  
Latino Leadership, Inc. (FL)  
Lawrence Community Works, Inc. (MA)  
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law  
Lawyers for Good Government - L4GG  
Learning Heroes (VA)  
Massachusetts Advocates for Children (MA)  
Mexican American Council (FL)  
National Association of English Learner Program Administrators - NAELPA  
National Association of School Psychologists

National Association for Bilingual Education - NABE  
National Center for Families Learning (KY)  
National Center for Learning Disabilities  
National Center for Youth Law  
National Council for Languages and International Studies - NCLIS  
National Parents Union  
National Urban League  
New America, Education Policy Program  
Northside American Federation of Teachers (TX)  
Northwest Side Housing Center (IL)  
One Stop Career Center of PR Inc. (PR)  
Our Turn  
Parent Institute for Quality Education - PIQE (CA)  
Parent Organization Network (CA)  
Partnership for Los Angeles Schools (CA)  
PF Bresee Foundation (CA)  
Project Vida (TX)  
Puentes New Orleans (LA)  
Respond Crisis Translation (CA)  
San Bernardino City Unified School District (CA)  
Save Our Schools Arizona (AZ)  
SchoolHouse Connection  
Sea Mar Community Health Centers (WA)  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center - SEARAC  
Southwest Economic Solutions (MI)  
Teach for America - TFA  
Teach Plus  
TESOL International Association  
The Education Trust  
The Opportunity Institute (CA)  
The University of Texas at El Paso (TX)  
TNTP  
TODEC Legal Center (CA)  
UnidosUS  
Watts/Century Latino Organization (CA)  
YPI Charter Schools (CA)