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See you at the  
conference!

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on Facebook!

# Oklahoma Association for Bilingual Education

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2

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## LLs—Who are They?

Greetings! My name is Kelly Forbes and I am very happy and excited to be your current president elect of this wonderful association. I would like to take a moment to introduce myself. I am the current principal at Zarrow International Elementary School in Tulsa Public Schools. It has been great to join the TPS team as I am helping native English speakers, the majority of the school's population, become bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural in an international setting within Oklahoma. Before my position with TPS, I worked for Oklahoma City Public Schools as a Spanish teacher, English language learner teacher, English language learner facilitator, as well as a Director of Bilingual Acquisition and Cultural Knowledge for Crooked Oak Public Schools. During my years working with second language learners in Oklahoma City Public Schools and Crooked Oak Public Schools I find myself perplexed while working with native English-speaking children in an immersion program and how that differs so much from working with English language learners.

So, I guess that this letter to all of you is more of a question of are we teaching our students a second language that is totally based on second language acquisition or are we segregating within ourselves English language learners from

language learners of other native languages? It has been very interesting, yet wonderful, to make the correlation between newcomer language learners from other countries and native English speaker from America who are, basically, newcomer students within our own international school. What does second language acquisition look like for our language learners and what does that look like for our low socio-economics students who are learning academic language as if it were their second language?

It is my hope that while working with other educators in Oklahoma, as well as the wonderful association of the Oklahoma Association for Bilingual Education, that we start to see a common thread in the successes for majority groups learning a target language in school, and that we view students, learning a second language, as DLLs—Dual Language Learners.

The most important thing that we must focus on while in a school is student learning and student achievement. However, we are so wrapped up and absorbed with test scores and observations that we sometimes are unable to focus on the humanistic side of education. This has been causing a great stress and strain on our second language learners. I hope that through this organization we are

able to come together and make a difference in the field of second language acquisition.

So, with that being said I support all of you and encourage you to share as much information with your principal as possible so that they might not only go to training, but actually implement a system in their schools that will help all language learners whether they be English, Spanish, Chinese, French, or any other language.

I am so proud of all of the educators across the state of Oklahoma and I applaud you for your efforts and for what you do for children every day! But, more so, I applaud you for providing an equitable environment in classrooms.

I look forward to meeting many of you at the next conference in November. And remember, keep on making today the very best day in all of your classrooms for this day begins the rest of our lives.



Kelly Forbes, Principal—Zarrow International School, Tulsa Public Schools

## Federal Guidance on Schools' Civil Rights Obligations for English Language Learners

- Dr. Kristin Grayson, IDRA  
(right)



“According to the Institute of Education, ELLs constitute 10 percent of the student population in this country—over 4.7 million students.”

Attention schools and school districts! [New guidance](#) addresses a topic that is timely and must be immediately addressed. On January 7 of this year, the U.S. Department of Education and Justice issued a significant guidance document concerning the obligations that school districts and states education agencies have in providing equal access for English language learners (ELLs) to a quality education.

This guidance comes at a time when our nation is celebrating the important milestone anniversaries of the passing of the *Civil Rights Act* in 1964 and the *Equal Educational Opportunities Act* in 1974, and the Supreme Court case, *Lau vs. Nichols* in 1974. It also comes at a time when diversity in public schools continues to increase as evidenced in the new Civil Rights Data Collection database. According to the Institute for Education Sciences, ELLs constitute 10 percent of the student population in this country – over 4.7 million students.

They are protected by law to an equitable education with equitable outcomes of student success. However, this is usually not reflected in data of their academic performance and/or treatment and opportunity in schools. For instance, the Civil Rights Data Collection for the 2011-12 school year found that while ELLs represented 5 percent of the high school population across the country, they were being retained at a rate of 11 percent. While 7 percent of the general population participated in gifted and talented programs, only 2 percent of ELLs were enrolled in these programs. The civil rights database reports such data at the national, state, district, and the campus levels and exposes alarming disparities. The data, without a doubt, indicate that changes must be made now.

Clearly, with this publication of a “Dear Colleague” letter and very explicit guidance, the U.S. Department of Education along with the Office for Civil Rights and the U.S. Department of Justice are stating that attention needs to be drawn to this issue. English language learners are significant part of U.S. public schools. It’s time to strengthen programs and services. Quality staff, resources, and the funding needed to implement programs must be provided. Programs for ELLs are not to be set up as an after-thought. They

are to be implemented fully in order to ensure students’ civil rights and because ELLs are *our kids, everyone’s kids*. By ensuring their academic success, we prepare them to be college-ready and to contribute to our communities. Embracing diversity and other languages helps all of us to think and share from our different perspectives, so that creative thinking and solutions to social issues are found.

The January federal document, for the first time, gathers all the key legal information concerning the education of ELLs into one place. It gives guidance over what the law requires and what it should look like in schools. The document details the 10 areas of non-compliance that the departments have found as they work across the country. As stated in the guidance document, this includes the obligations of districts to do the following.

- A. Identify and assess ELL students in need of language assistance in a timely, valid and reliable manner.
- B. Provide ELL students with a language assistance program that is educationally sound and proven successful.
- C. Sufficiently staff and support the language assistance programs for ELL students.
- D. Ensure ELL students have equal opportunities to meaningfully participate in all curricular and extracurricular activities, including the core curriculum, graduation requirements, specialized and advanced courses and programs, sports and clubs.
- E. Avoid unnecessary segregation of ELL students.
- F. Ensure that ELL students with disabilities under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* or Section 504 are evaluated in a timely and appropriate manner for special education and disability-related services and that their language needs are considered in evaluations and delivery of services.
- G. Meet the needs of ELL students who opt out of language assistance programs.
- H. Monitor and evaluate ELL students in language assistance programs to ensure their progress with respect to acquiring English proficiency and grade level core

content, exit ELL students from language assistance programs when they are proficient in English, and monitor exited students to ensure they were not prematurely exited and that any academic deficits incurred in the language assistance program have been remedied.

- I. Evaluate the effectiveness of a school district’s language assistance program(s) to ensure that ELL students in each program acquire English proficiency and that each program was reasonably calculated to allow ELL students to attain parity of participation in the standard instructional program within a reasonable period of time.
- J. Ensure meaningful communication with parents of ELL students.

School districts also must remember that families of English language learners have recourse through the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) when they feel that their civil rights have been violated. Families who feel that their children suffer from the ravages of discrimination can file a complaint with the OCR, which reviews and determines the legitimacy of the complaints and brings it to the attention of school districts for immediate action and remedy. While this all might seem daunting, an exciting feature of this guidance document is that it clearly lays out what needs to be done for ELL students. School district and campus leaders can review the document and evaluate their program status and needs. The document gives explicit details about what needs to be done if an area of non-compliance is noted.

For example, a sample scenario is given about an elementary school: “The school finds that there is a disparity with the number of ELLs enrolled in their GT program. However, they noticed that there is a student very gifted in math yet low in reading skills. By allowing that student to take a non-verbal or a math-only test, the student qualifies for the math GT program. She is also in an intensive language development class 30 minutes per day along with a grade level teacher who is ESL certified and has received extensive training in sheltered instruction.”

Click [here](#) to check out more!

## Closing the Achievement Gap: What Matters Most for American Indian Students

Sigmund A. Boloz, Northern Arizona University (NABE WEBSITE)

Over the years, I have visited dozens of schools in the southwest that serve significant populations of American Indian students. In fact, I was the principal of one of those schools for 22 years. As it was then and still remains, I find that most of these schools are desperately trying to improve the overall achievement of their students, particularly in the areas of reading and writing. My visits to these schools have led me to believe that the problem faced by most, while not easily fixed, is a lack of a solid understanding of how to teach reading and writing. As a result of the lack of this foundation, most schools adopt basal textbook programs, which dictate the parameters of these schools' literacy programs. However, basal programs are tools of the teaching trade and are only as effective as the teachers who implement them. I don't mean to suggest that local educators are not making the decisions to adopt these programs; rather, I mean, that the decisions to adopt a particular program are seldom based on a clear understanding or grounding of what the school staff has identified as essential for the teaching of literacy for their American Indian students. Try asking the question yourself. Ask a teacher of American Indian students to explain the focus of their school's approach to literacy and quite probably you will hear, "We use Happy Trails," or "We use Hear Our Voices." While both of these names are fictitious, my point is, that many schools adopt basal textbook programs in hopes that the programs themselves will eliminate underachievement. And why shouldn't school administrators and teachers believe this, because for almost two decades now, educators have been sold the idea that fidelity to "research-based" programs is the answer to underachievement. This is ironic because no research existed then or now to suggest that maintaining fidelity to a core reading program will provide effective reading lessons. Examining the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results from 2011 assess-

ment and comparing them to earlier assessments, it is interesting to note that under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), a time of extreme pressure to adopt "research-based" basal reading programs that the achievement gap between native and non-native students has not lessened. Therefore, I argue that the basal programs are not the answer. Basal reading textbooks can be one important tool in a teacher's toolbox, but they should not be dictating what should be taught in American Indian classrooms. On the other hand, I assert that teachers are the solution when our teachers are sensitive to Indigenous Bilingual Education local cultures and communities and are well grounded in reading theory and pedagogy. Nationwide, publishing companies that produce basal textbooks and scripted literacy programs hold much more sway on daily practice than do actual research activities. During the NCLB decade, publishers promoted their programs by associating their approaches as being "researched-based" when in fact, these programs are merely "evidence-based," which means that they are organized with the current research, usually including at most a few American Indian students. The basal programs themselves are not research-based. In this new decade of the Common Core State Standards or what I'll refer to as the Core, many publishers now tout their materials with brightly colored stickers as being aligned to the "Common Core." The message to schools and to teachers is clear: This product will teach the Core. Further making basal programs and scripted programs more attractive, is the fact that schools nationwide are in a footrace on a short course but up a steep mountain. With the advent of the Core, so much has been changed in such a short time, and our nation's schools are faced with helping their students to achieve new, more demanding learning benchmarks. To compound this seismic shift in curricula and pedagogy, even if the publishers wish to help teach the Core effectively, right now, much of that curriculum materials just aren't ready. I appreciate the fact that millions of dollars are invested by publishing companies to develop each basal series, and I believe that textbook companies have attempted to develop useful products that offend no one and include

everyone. Unfortunately, once adopted, fidelity to the implementation of these basal programs has replaced the development of effective teachers as our end goal. However, no research has been done that shows that maintaining fidelity to a core reading program will provide effective reading lessons. In other words, fidelity to a flawed program is not a virtue. The bottom line is that there is just no way to create good schools without good teachers. Those who have worked to improve education over the last several decades have learned that school reform cannot be "teacher-proofed." School administrators are misplacing their primary emphasis and resources on the adoption of commercially produced basal textbook materials, when effective and efficient teachers are the answer. We must develop teachers as strategic and critical decision makers, who know their communities, their children, the literacy curriculum and who possess effective pedagogical skills. Research has long identified the expertise of the teacher as the critical factor in the quality of reading lessons offered. We know that the actual curriculum an average child learns, in the same



course and in the same school, varies tremendously from teacher to teacher; what the students learn depends on what teacher they have. Theodore Sizer (1990, p. xii) once warned us that if we tell a teacher how to do everything and if we deny that teacher the freedom to act on his or her wisdom then we relegate faculty to a position of simple place-holders, not wise people and as a consequence, we will create third-rate schools. More than 40 years ago, Peters and Waterman (1982) informed us that the hallmark of any successful organization is a shared sense among its members about what they are trying to accomplish. Effective teachers

have a strong sense of efficacy, or the expectation that their efforts will result in valued outcomes. Ralph Tyler (Ridings, 1981) chided that we remember that the teacher is the one working with students when he insisted that it is the teacher who should decide what is important to learn in a particular situation. A well-developed, strategically implemented, long-term professional development plan that empowers teachers to be critical decision makers is the answer to improving the achievement of native students. However, studies have shown that the typical reading specialist had less educational preparation in their field than did other specialists working in U.S. schools. Most U.S. schools, then, employ few teachers who know much about reading development or how to facilitate the acquisition of English language skills. As a result, commercially developed basal programs have stepped in to fill this void. I

believe that this stance is the major obstacle to school improvement efforts. Schools must examine the underpinning of their literacy programs. Teachers need become more grounded. Only then will we begin to address the underachievement of our native students.



# Oklahoma Association for Bilingual Education fall conference

November 13th and 14th, 2015

Friday—November 13th, 2015:

Edmond Community Center with Special Guest—Stephen Krashen

\*\* Friday ONLY + Membership = \$40 registration

Saturday—November 14th

University of Central Oklahoma with Special Guest—Dr. Raul Font

\*\* BOTH DAYS + Membership = \$70 registration



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We would love to share any events, stories, or memories that you have in the newsletter. If you have something that you would like to be added to the newsletter, please e-mail me at [culvech@yahoo.com](mailto:culvech@yahoo.com), and I will do my best to share it with all of our members.

\*\* Remember, it is up to the discretion of the OABE board what will appear in the OABE newsletter

[www.oabe.weebly.com](http://www.oabe.weebly.com)  
(OABE WEBSITE)

## **UPCOMING EVENTS:**

### **OABE FALL CONFERENCE**

Edmond, Oklahoma—UCO  
November 13th and 14th  
\*\* REGISTER TODAY\*\*

### **NABE · National Association for Bilingual Education**

Chicago—March 2nd (Pre)  
March 3-5, 2016 (Conference)

### **UCO Multicultural Institute**

March 4 & 5, 2016

### **TESOL 2016 Conference**

Baltimore, Maryland  
April 5-8, 2016