

August 16, 2013

I am writing in strong support of replacing the ELL Category with an “Ever ELL” category as proposed by the Washington State Board of Education for use in the Washington State accountability measure. I am a school Board Director in the Tukwila School District in Washington. Our district has 39% of our students who are ELL students. I believe the Ever ELL category would be better for the following reasons:

1. The current ELL category is fundamentally different from all the other subgroup categories. It is the only category where students are tested in a language they don't understand. This is not a valid test of anything. This is the only category where students are not counted in the category when they become proficient in English. Using the same proficiency goals for this category as all the other categories makes no sense.
2. As a board member, an Ever ELL category would provide me with a much better measure of how my ELL students are doing. I need to know not only how they are progressing in the acquisition of basic English, but how well they do after they become proficient in basic English and continue their education in the various content areas. This is an important measure of how well our ELL program has prepared them to be successful beyond just acquiring basic English skills.
3. The current system almost guarantees that schools with ELL students will end up being negatively branded by such terms as “struggling” or “failing”. The press only reports the labels and does not report on what may be a very successful ELL program at the school. In addition to the negative branding, principals are required to do a lot of additional paperwork which does not provide any additional support for the students. Even if schools are doing a very good job educating ELL students, it is almost impossible to get out of struggling status because the students that are successfully acquiring basic English skills are removed from the ELL category.

Dave Larson

Tukwila School Board Director