

Female: Welcome to this two-part podcast hosted by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition, OELA. We're here with Maha Fukuda, an education program specialist from OELA. Joining Maha are Dr. Aida Walqui from WestEd, Dr. Ilana Umansky from University of Oregon, and Dr. Karen Thompson from Oregon State University. English learners at the secondary level who are approaching high school graduation face unique challenges. For example, secondary ELs must not only meet the standard graduation requirements determined by their local educational agency but have to also take and pass English language development classes. As students are returning for the new school year, it's important to identify and eliminate structural barriers and accessibility issues that may impact English learners.

In the first part of this podcast, Dr. Walqui, Dr. Umansky, and Dr. Thompson answered questions that were submitted during the English Learners in Secondary Schools' "Trajectories, Transition Points, and Promising Practices" webinar about supporting ELs in meeting graduation requirements, mitigating risks that may lead ELs to drop out of school and providing English language development or ELD instruction. In part two of the podcast, the panelists will address questions about the needs of students with limited or interrupted formal education, professional learning opportunities for educators of secondary ELs, and promising practices that can help educators meet the needs of ELs in secondary schools. Let's get the conversation started.

Maha: Hello, and welcome back. Our next question is for Dr. Umansky. Can you speak to the educational needs of students with limited or interrupted formal education?

Dr. Umansky: Thank you, Maha, for this important question. So, students with limited or interrupted formal education, sometimes the acronym used is SLIFE or SIFE students, are an important subgroup of newcomer students in schools. In general, students with limited or interrupted formal education do quite well when they enter in elementary grades. Generally, elementary schools place students into general ed classes and they do very well and catch up. There are some really important structural barriers that come into play though when students with interrupted or limited formal education first enter U.S. schools at the secondary level. And these relate to a lot of the things that we've been talking about today, particularly with regard to graduation requirements, as well

as aging out policies, which are, you know, state-level policies about when students can no longer remain in public high schools.

So, I'll talk a little bit about some promising practices with regard to how to support these students at the secondary level. And I'm going to draw here largely on a study that I participated in with Megan Hopkins and Daphne Dubach a few years ago, which is part of a larger report that Karen was also a part of on newcomer students that was done through the Council of Chief State School Officers. And we'll link to that where we put this podcast. But in that study, we were able to go to six different districts that were having rapid changes in their newcomer and SIFE or SLIFE populations, and learn from those districts across the country about what they were doing to support these students. So, I wanna walk you through five things that we thought was really interesting that we learned a lot about.

The first is the importance of intake. And here too I wanna draw your attention to our recent 2021 publication of the REL Northwest toolkit, authored by Jason Greenberg Motamedi and Lorna Porter and their colleagues, about welcoming and registering newcomer students when they first arrive. But intake, we heard from these six districts, is critically important because it's a first meeting with these students and families and it's an opportunity to learn as much as possible at that point. So, this is the perfect opportunity to identify if a student has interruptions in their formal education or gaps in formal education. And some of these districts were implementing things like home language, literacy assessments, math assessments, as well as getting just histories from the family about what the immigration experience included and what the prior schooling history of the student was.

So, this is a really important opportunity both to welcome families, give them the support that they need as they're starting out, but also learning as much as possible. And then critical to this is also communicating what is found to the teachers...excuse me, to the students' teachers. So, intake is really important, communicating that information that's learned and planning to support the student as much as possible based on what's learned and, of course, adapting as needed. But that's a critical opportunity.

The second thing has to do with credits. So, this is a major structural barrier because when students come in with limited or gaps in their formal schooling, it's oftentimes hard for them to reach the credits necessary to graduate in time.

So, the first thing is providing credits where credits are due. So, this has to do with providing credits based on transcripts that the students are bringing with them. So, when the student does have some formal education where the student can be awarded credits to make sure that the student is given credits for their prior schooling. Second, are things like credit recovery programs. Angela Johnson has a paper about this, about a newcomer summer school program, but things like summer school for SIFE or SLIFE students, online credit recovery program. Some of these things to try to get students as many meaningful high-quality credits as possible in the time that they have.

Third, and this is something that Aida was just talking about, are these concentrated temporary, high-quality, high-challenging educational environments. So, these are things like newcomer academies, or even specific courses, like maybe it's a math class that's specifically for students who have gaps in their formal education and need to learn core concepts in math before they can move on to high school level math. So, that's the third is these concentrated temporary services. And as Aida indicated, it's really critical that these are temporary and that as soon as students are able, they are moved into general education classes and grade-level classes. And Karen, I believe, was talking about this about extra time and really allowing newcomer and SLIFE students to have extra years so that they can complete the credits that they need to graduate. But also, there's other opportunities for extra time, as I mentioned before, summer school, or adding extra periods onto the day, so that these students can have more time in school, because oftentimes that's what they need is more time.

And then finally, we also saw that some of these districts were having really meaningful partnerships to provide both academic and wraparound services to SLIFE students and their families. And these could be partnerships with community colleges, or they could be partnerships with refugee resettlement agencies or other social services. So, those were the five, sort of, main promising practices that we identified in supporting SIFE or SLIFE students towards reaching graduation.

Maha: Thank you, Dr. Umansky. Thank you for that reminder on taking advantage of all extended learning opportunities for students with limited or interrupted education. The next question is for Dr. Walqui. How can institutions of higher learning address the challenges in supporting the educational outcomes of secondary English learners? What about in-service professional

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learning for secondary EL teachers? What can states and districts do to enhance the ability of all secondary teachers to support English learners?

Dr. Walqui: Thank you, Maha. This is such an important question. And I just want to begin by emphasizing how exciting it is for me to have both Ilana and Karen as part of our center because they keep talking about all the wonderful work the university does with school leaders, with school teachers. And I think they exemplify the kind of commitment that universities need to have with the teachers that they prepared or are preparing for practice. Truth is that, for example, talking about California, most of the teachers are educated in the Cal State system. And the Cal State system is such a massive enterprise that most of the teachers teaching education are adjuncts. And so there is very little time for people in charge of teacher education to sit down around the table and discuss, how do we all contribute to building the kind of beginning teacher that we want to graduate? I think that is a very serious problem. I think universities, teacher education centers as a whole, should begin there. What do we envision our graduate teachers doing? And how does each of our courses contribute to that way? And how do we do this?

I mean, it's amazing. I hear students sometimes saying that they are given the same readings to read in two or three different courses. Well, they're not exactly complaining but that should not be the case, right? Or perhaps, yes, the reading is so good it merits to be revisited from two or three different perspectives but then the perspectives must be made very clear. So, that's one thing. I think that teacher preparation universities, ideally, and I know this would require a big change, everything actually requires a big change, should be part of the teacher professional development efforts of districts. And these efforts are ongoing. Teachers develop their expertise and keep developing, there's never an ending point until they retire. There's lots to learn. Just think of the text we read or think of the texts people in general misread today. Sam Weinberg at Stanford has just published a new report on how, you know, students and adults, even in universities, do not know how to judge texts that appear on the internet.

Now, that speaks very poorly of the kind of education they got, we cannot blame them. We have to blame the apprenticeship they went through and that apprenticeship is the responsibility of educators and certainly the responsibility of IHEs. I remember once visiting Alverno College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin because I had heard they have a really wonderful program where they only admit into teacher education students who are first-generation in college, and

then they track them. Once they graduate them, they actually meet with them once a week to see how they are doing in their teaching assignments. And they take that job so seriously that these meetings go on for the first two years intensively and with less intensity throughout their first decade as teachers remain in the area, of course. So, I think there they take the responsibility immensely seriously as we all should. But as I have alluded, many others systemic issues need to change. And we know that unfortunately, teacher education is not especially well funded. And that I think is a myopic act because there is no more important work, no more important product than the citizens that schools graduate and we definitely need them.

So, I see an immense wall for IHEs in addressing the challenges, including one that I would like to close with, and it's a tough one, and it's the challenge of having a consensus about what is the right literature? What are the right stances? What are the right theories, and which are not? Almost four decades ago, Lee Schulman wrote a very nice piece comparing why doctors are a profession, medical doctors are a profession, and why teachers are not. And he started with there is a clear knowledge base that is shared by all doctors. If a doctor today wanted to bleed a patient, well, obviously, that would be called medieval, and the doctor would immediately suffer the consequences. But we don't have those systems of either personal internal accountability or of collective internal accountability, where all the other teachers at the school are safeguarding the benefit of students, and in this case, the future development of English learners. But the knowledge base is important.

And today, we still have teachers teaching methodology courses that adhere to theories that have long been debunked and that mustn't happen. We need to have a strong push for more coherence in the field and this coherence does not need to play at the institutional level. If we all abide by the same larger principle, well, those principles can be enacted and situated in different ways. Everybody has to put their signature on it. But we cannot afford any longer to pretend that students have to learn the grammar of the language, as suppose to the structure and purpose of the discourse, and many other ELs that I could go on and on talking about, but I'll stop because I know that Karen and Ilana, being IHEs, would love to give us a couple of examples of the wonderful things that they do in Oregon.

Dr. Thompson: I can say a little bit about some efforts that I've been privileged to be part of at Oregon State University. And I think I just wanted to highlight

opportunities, as Aida mentioned, for IHEs to partner both with states and districts, and at the federal level as well. So, I wanted to highlight, this was a while ago now, but back in 2014, the Oregon Department of Education funded a collaboration, professional learning for teachers across the state through a massive open online course that was created in partnership between OSU and understanding language at Stanford University. And through state investment, the course was completely free to educators across the state and districts had the opportunity to use state funds to add on to the online course materials through in-person convenings of participating teachers in their districts. And we recently published an article about that experience and what some case study districts did to further enhance the professional learning through that massive open online course. So, I think that it's just an example of how states can facilitate professional learning within districts.

And then also, I've had the good fortune to be the principal investigator for an OELA national professional development project that has provided funding for over 100 teachers in Oregon to earn their ESL endorsement, primarily licensed teachers, and also some pre-service teachers as well. Yeah, it's either an ESL endorsement or a dual language specialization. And so, that's just been a wonderful opportunity for teachers to take really rigorous courses, engaging with amplifying the curriculum by Aida Walqui and George Bunch and other new resources to really enhance their thinking about really analyzing the content and language practices in their classes and learning more about how to support multilingual students and their families. So, I think IHEs can do their best work when they're partnering with states and districts and school leaders to really meet the needs that practitioners are seeing on the ground.

Maha: Thank you, Dr. Walqui and Dr. Thompson, thank you for highlighting for us ways that we can increase and enhance the professionalism of the teaching profession where teachers are tasked with the cognitive development of our students in the future workforce. Our last question, we're going to go back to Dr. Thompson. Given all of the challenges we know of facing secondary English learners in schools in terms of best meeting their needs, what are the bright spots or promising practices? Can you speak to particular programs or schools that we can learn from?

Dr. Thompson. Thanks, Maha. That's a big question. And what I wanna do is mention a variety of resources that we'll provide links to in the notes for the podcast because I think there is a lot of really exciting work happening, lots of

people across the country who are just doing amazing work that is really wonderful and I would love for people to have the opportunity to know about. So, I wanted to start by mentioning a book that some people may be familiar with already, but it's called "Preparing English Learners for College and Career." It came out a couple of years ago, it was co-authored by a team led by Maria Santos. And they profile of several high schools, I believe six high schools that are really doing an exceptional job of, as the title says, "Preparing English Learners for College and Career," and they highlight key practices that are in place at all of these case study high schools. They emphasize themes we've been talking about today. Having a shared vision, having both the teachers and administrators really having a vision and building on the assets, recognizing and building on the assets of the multilingual students they're serving. Really working to continually learn and build capacity, integrating language and content. So that book is a great resource.

In addition, I wanted to mention the Internationals Network. It's a network in several states that are public schools focused particularly on serving newcomer students. And they, again, within their network emphasize many of the same themes that we've been talking about that are highlighted in preparing English learners for college and career as well. And having really high challenge, high support curriculum across their classes, providing professional learning for teachers and administrators. And I think there's a lot to learn from them as well. I also wanted to just encourage everyone, if you are not already part of a local or regional professional learning community that is focused on improving education for secondary English learners, I've just seen wonderful examples in my experience of just local or regional networks being powerful places for sharing promising practices.

So, I had the opportunity to work with a group of districts in the California Central Valley that convened regularly to share things they were doing. One district that I just wanted to mention that has a wealth of resources that everyone can learn from online is the Sanger Unified School District. They have a website, sangerlearns.com, where they post a wealth of resources about how they've implemented, for example, individualized language plans, as Ilana was mentioning for students to really look comprehensively at their academic progress and what support they might need to continue that progress. And [inaudible 00:24:00], another district in the Central Valley, also implemented those and continued learning together from Sanger here in Oregon. A local

district started a group of administrators that convene regularly to talk through issues and that grew to include more and more districts as they all wanted to be part of the rich discussion.

So, I think that finding colleagues to connect with in-person or virtually as well...there's some wonderful Facebook groups, for example, focused on dual language that can help...We haven't talked too much about dual language at the secondary level, but there's a growing movement, as I'm sure many listeners know, to extend dual-language programs at the elementary level where they're most common up through the secondary level and there are educators connecting virtually about that to share resources as well. So, that's just a taste of some things that I've had the opportunity to learn about.

Maha: Thank you, Dr. Thompson, Dr. Umansky, and Dr. Walqui. Thank you very much for joining us today. We appreciate all the information that you shared. We also would like to thank our listeners for joining us for today's discussion.

Female: A big thank you to our three panelists for discussing the education of secondary English learners. The information, reflections, and experiences that you shared with us today will certainly help educators support this population of students. You have given us many useful ideas to think about as we continue to serve English learners across the country. As this podcast comes to a close, I encourage all of you to visit the NCELA website@www.ncela.ed.gov and check out the many educator resources available there, including the English Learners in Secondary Schools' "Trajectories, Transition Points, and Promising Practices" webinar.