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A Conversation with Jim McCobb AOE Title III/English Learner (EL) Coordinator

Q: I know that we no longer use the term ELL. What is the correct reference?

English Learner (EL) is the updated term used in the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA). However, the term English Language Learner is still widely used by practitioners in the field of English language acquisition.

Q: Can you tell me a little about the EL population in Vermont?

Students identified as ELs currently number around 1,700 in Vermont K-12 public schools. Compared to many other states, Vermont's EL population is relatively small (about 2%) in relation to its total public-school enrollment, but it has grown steadily over the last 30 years. This has largely been due to the successful resettlement of refugee individuals and families from many parts of the world, representing diverse language and cultural groups. ELs in VT schools also come from immigrant, migrant, multilingual, and adoptive families in the US.

Q: In what areas are supports most needed?

As soon as students enroll, they need to be promptly identified and screened to determine their English language proficiency level. Licensed EL staff interpret the test results and other info in order to plan and implement an appropriate language instruction educational program (LIEP). EL teachers and the students' other educators need to collaborate to support language development and academic instruction for ELs. The district/school administration needs to ensure that all educators have professional learning opportunities for working with ELs and that multilingual families receive meaningful communication necessary to understand and engage in their child's educational program.

Q: What is some practical advice/resources you'd like to offer educators of ELs?

As a member of the **WIDA Consortium** for 15 years now, VT educators can find lots of resources to support ELs on the [WIDA website](#). Educators who want to explore and understand the language multilingual students need to be successful in school should visit the [Language for Learning](#) web page. The WIDA website also includes many guides, briefs, reports, training materials, and other resources on a variety of topics, including: English Language Development Standards and Assessments; Instructional Supports for Language Development and Content Learning for ELs; Professional Learning; Research; and Family Engagement.

Q: What safeguards are in place to ensure that ELs receive access and equitable learning opportunities?

The US Department of Education's website provides extensive guidance documents on the topic of State and Local Education Agencies' civil rights obligations for serving ELs and their families. Qualified EL professionals help plan, implement programs/services, and coordinate with other educators in schools in order to ensure that English Learners receive the equitable educational access and opportunities that they are entitled to by law.

Q: How do you see the Vermont Multi-Tiered System of Supports (VTmtss) promoting success for these students?

For a discussion of how MTSS can support ELs, I would refer readers back to the Dr. Claudia Rinaldi's MTSS article, *Helping English Language Learners Succeed with a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)*, mentioned at the beginning of this issue of the MTSS Educational Equity Brief and also included in the references at the end. The ideal for any educational system striving to improve language development and academic instruction for ELs with varying experiences and levels of language proficiency, literacy, and content skills and knowledge is to create a climate of shared responsibility, advocacy, collaborative goals, and ongoing professional learning.