

Meeting the Moment: Funding and Support for English Learners



Access to resources in public schools for English Learners (ELs) and their families is at risk due to proposed elimination of Title III funding and decreased civil rights enforcement mechanisms.



**500,000
Asian
American
students
are English
Learners**

Over half a million EL students in public schools are Asian American, representing 10% of all ELs in the U.S. Despite this, there are few school resources offered in Asian languages, including limited translation and interpretation services for students and families who speak Asian languages.ⁱ The lack of resources is a barrier for students and families needing information to participate equally and meaningfully in public schools. Students who are ELs need adequate and appropriate resources to receive a quality education to fully participate in our democracy and future workforce.

Despite a great need for more tailored language supports and services, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) has abandoned decades of guidance, funding and support for ELs, their families, and educators.ⁱⁱ

Since 2025, ED has created the following policy conditions that present threats to the success of students who are ELs:

RESCINDED ENGLISH LEARNER GUIDANCE:

In August 2025, ED rescinded guidance for state and local education agencies (SEA and LEAs) on how to meet their legal obligations to ELs and family members with limited English proficiency (LEP) under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and Title III of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).ⁱⁱⁱ The guidance provides detailed civil rights obligations and best practices for language assistance, curriculum access, professional learning for educators, meeting the needs of ELs with disabilities, monitoring English language proficiency, and evaluating program effectiveness. While legal obligations under Title VI and Title III remain, rescinding guidance sends a message to school communities that the needs of 5.3 million ELs and their LEP families are no longer a priority. See [AAJC's English Learner Rights Factsheets](#) for more information on the rights of ELs.^{iv}

ZERO FUNDING FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS:

ED has proposed to zero out Title III funding for ELs in FY 2027. Since 2002, Congress has consistently funded Title III to support hiring and training effective teachers, providing translation, interpretation, professional development, family literacy programs, parent outreach, supplementary before and after-school programs for English language acquisition.^v In FY 2025, Congress appropriated \$890 million for EL education, accounting for only 0.7% of all federal funding for elementary and secondary education. Slashing funding creates immense obstacles for state and local education agencies (SEAs and LEAs) to power the programs that fulfill legal and civil rights obligations to ELs and LEP families.^{vi}

ED-created policy conditions that present threats to the success of students who are ELs, continued:

DISSOLVING THE OFFICE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION (OELA):

One year prior to dissolving OELA in May 2026, ED fired virtually all staff—leaving only one employee.^{vii} This office held institutional knowledge and expertise in English learner education, administered Title III grants, provided technical assistance, professional learning, and partnership with SEAs and LEAs in implementing practices and programs to ensure ELs are able to participate equally and meaningfully in public schools.^{viii, ix}

CRIPPLING THE OFFICE OF CIVIL RIGHTS (OCR):

In March 2025, an office that once boasted 1,100 staff members was reduced to a couple hundred employees. 7 out of 12 regional enforcement offices have been shuttered.^x As of January 2025, there were 124 open cases at OCR pertaining to "English language learners." Since then, **none of these cases have been resolved.**^{xi} Appropriately staffing OCR is crucial to investigating violations of federal laws, address, resolving these complaints in a timely manner, and ensuring that ELs are protected in cases involving discrimination and equal access.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

We urge policymakers to continue supporting ELs in the following ways:



Fund Title III in FY 2027 Appropriations:

Title III funds are critical for providing state and local education agencies with the resources necessary for hiring and equipping staff to meet the learning needs of students who are ELs. We request level funding of \$890 million for ELs as Congress has previously committed to in FY 2026.



Hold the Department of Justice and Department of Education Accountable for its Statutory Obligations to ELs:

Congress must ensure that the Department of Justice continues to enforce federal civil rights laws. In addition, ED must be held accountable for fulfilling its regulatory responsibility to assess complaints, provide guidance, technical assistance, as well as timely distribution of funds to state and local education agencies to support ELs.



Support HR 7233, the Language Access for All bill:

Introduced by Representatives Chu, Meng, Goldman, and Vargas, this bill would codify Executive Order 13166, requiring every federal agency—including ED—to “[establish] a coordinated, accountable framework to ensure meaningful access for individuals with limited English proficiency. The legislation promotes consistency across agencies, increases transparency and public engagement, and updates federal language access policy to reflect evolving technologies.”^{xii, xiii, xiv}

See AAJC’s [English Learner Rights Factsheets](#) for more information on the rights of ELs.

CITATIONS:

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- [xii] Federal Register :: Request Access. (n.d.). Unblock.Federalregister.Gov. Retrieved September 4, 2026, from <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2000/08/16/00-20938/improving-access-to-services-for-persons-with-limited-english-proficiency>
- [xiii] House Resolution 7233. "Language Access for All." <https://chu.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/rep-chu-meng-goldman-and-vargas-introduce-bill-protect-multilingual>
- [xiv] Representative Judy Chu. Press release, January 23, 2026. <https://chu.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/rep-chu-meng-goldman-and-vargas-introduce-bill-protect-multilingual>