



Congressman

RAUL M. GRIJALVA

Serving the people of Arizona's 7th District

Reaching English Learners Act

S. xxxx / H.R. xxxx



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There are over 5 million EL students across the country – one in ten public school students. While Spanish is the primary language for most EL students, other languages are also prevalent, including Chinese, Vietnamese, and Arabic.

Teaching ELs requires a specific skillset and unique teaching strategies, but the Department of Education reports that 32 states have a shortage of teachers for EL students, making them unable to meet the students' needs. The difficulties in instructing this growing population are reflected in a shocking academic achievement gap: the National Center for Education Statistics reports that the rate of high school graduation for ELs in 2017-18 was 68 percent, compared to 85 percent for non-ELs. Additionally, data from the 2019 National Assessment of Education Progress indicates that just 10 percent of ELs in 4th grade and four percent of ELs in 8th grade are at or above proficiency in reading compared to 39 percent and 36 percent of non-ELs.

The Reaching English Learners Act would address this crisis by funding teacher preparation programs for future EL teachers under Title II Part B of the Higher Education Act. Institutions of higher education would be required to partner with high-need local educational agencies to build or strengthen teaching programs that provide EL teacher candidates with skills related to:

- Helping ELs in early childhood, elementary, and secondary programs achieve at high levels and attain English proficiency
- Recognizing and addressing the social and emotional needs of ELs
- Appropriately identifying and instructing ELs with disabilities
- Promoting parental, family, and community engagement in EL educational programs.

The bill would require teaching programs to offer high-quality clinical learning opportunities and provide the necessary coursework for teacher candidates to qualify for EL teaching certifications. Grant preference would be given to programs that recruit and enroll former ELs and students from other underrepresented groups, and recipients would be required to report on the effectiveness of the program to the Department of Education.



FIVE REASONS TO SUPPORT THE BILL

1. The Reaching ELs Act acknowledges and addresses the disparities in EL achievement by investing in the EL teacher pipeline.
2. Better prepares teachers of EL students to support their students in attaining higher English proficiency.
3. Better prepares teachers of EL students to accurately assess disabilities, addressing the issue of mismatched services that currently faces EL students.
4. Supports the building of EL teacher skills to support the needs of EL students, including SEL, dual language, and family and community engagement strategies.
5. Invests in the building of an education system the more accurately represents and supports our country's student population.

Reaching ELs Act is endorsed by:
Joint National Committee for Languages,
National Council for Languages and
International Studies, Coalition of
Community-Based Heritage Languages
Schools, National Association of Bilingual
Education, American Council on the
Teaching of Foreign Languages, Hispanic
Association of Colleges and Universities,
TESOL International Association,
National Education Association,
UnidosUS. American Federation of
Teachers