This research project was initiated by Stand for Children in response to member questions and concerns about programs and services for English Language Learners (ELL’s) in Oregon schools.

It was published in March 2014.
BACKGROUND

Over the course of four months, interviews were conducted with parents, English Language Development (ELD) teachers and specialists, principals, counselors, and administrators from the Beaverton, Forest Grove, Reynolds, and Salem-Keizer School Districts, as well as staff from the Oregon Department of Education’s Office of Educational Equity and various community organizations (Appendix A).

The four school districts involved in the study are clearly invested in improving the academic achievement of ELL’s while complying with all state and federal regulations regarding ELL’s and Title III funds.

Beginning in 2014, Oregon will phase in new English Language Proficiency Standards that are linked to the Common Core State Standards. As schools and districts work to strengthen their ELD programs, many have begun transitions to classroom and content-based instructional models that will better support ELL’s in developing the language skills they need to meet subject area standards.
FINDINGS

While all the parents and educators who participated share the same goal of helping English Language Learners succeed in school, there are clearly gaps in communication that make it more difficult for parents and guardians to support their children’s English language acquisition.

Many parents report that they receive little feedback about their children’s progress in ELD and are frustrated that ELD teachers are often not available to provide it. They had a variety of questions about how and why their children were placed in ELD and how they would progress and exit the program (Appendix B).

The educators universally recognize the importance of parent involvement for the success of all students including ELL’s. All of the districts studied have developed networks of translators and bilingual support staff to assist with this process. They are conscious of barriers to parent involvement for many families of ELL’s including language, cultural norms, transportation, child care, work schedules, and lack of familiarity with the American education system.

Currently a great deal of parent engagement effort is focused on overcoming these barriers and familiarizing parents with school practices, expectations, and resources. However, there is much less consistency in the quality and utility of information that families receive about a student’s individual progress through ELD. For example:

• Annual parent placement letters must identify the student’s current level of English proficiency but do not include any history of growth from previous years. Because proficiency levels are dissociated from grade levels, this may mean that a parent could fail to realize that their child’s English proficiency level is not advancing.

• Schools receive ELPA scores after students test in the spring but are not required to report these results to families until the fall placement letter—by which time months of opportunity for intervention are lost. Many schools and districts do not distribute the full Individual Student Reports provided by ODE which contain detailed information about student performance across the four language domains and can provide insight into specific strengths and weaknesses.

• While secondary students receive grades when enrolled in an ELD class period, many elementary school report cards do not include progress reports from ELD teachers, and parents report that classroom teachers are often unprepared to discuss ELD progress.

• When students exit ELD, all parents must be notified that they are being reclassified and will be monitored for two years, but the notification is not required to explain how a student will be monitored or by whom.

“There is much less consistency in the quality and utility of information that families receive about a student’s individual progress through ELD.”
RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this study, Stand for Children has concluded that there is a clear opportunity to increase parental support for English Language Learners by improving understanding of the ELD process and providing specific feedback about individual student progress. Stand has developed educational materials which outline the path of an English Language Learner in Oregon, address frequent parent concerns, and identify key stages for parent involvement (Appendix C). In addition, we recommend the following steps to promote parent engagement and student success in English language acquisition:

SCHOOLS

• Should provide the ELD teacher’s name and contact information to the parents/guardians of every student enrolled in ELD.
• Should make ELD teachers available during conferences or develop alternate opportunities for parents to meet with ELD staff.

DISTRICTS

• Should provide the name and contact information for the staff responsible for monitoring their students’ progress after reclassification/exit from ELD and communicate monitoring criteria to parents.

• Should include a report of ELD progress in every report card at the elementary and secondary levels.
• Should distribute the Individual Student Report of ELPA scores to parents when scores are received in the spring.
• Should modify parent placement letters to reflect an ELL’s proficiency growth so parents can effectively monitor their student’s progress.
• Should develop relationships with refugee service providers, community organizations, and local cultural networks to partner in addressing barriers to school readiness and parent engagement.

STATE

• Should reduce confusion by clearly defining the preferred terms for English language instruction, students currently receiving this instruction, and students who have ever been eligible for or participated in this instruction, and promoting their consistent use across the state (note variations on contact list). A list of standard translations for key terms in the most commonly spoken languages would also be beneficial.
• Should develop clear and readily accessible general information about ELD programs and assessments that can be used by parents, schools, districts, and community partners across the state to support parent engagement in schools.
APPENDIX A

CONTACTS

Oregon Department of Education – Office of Education Equity
Tim Blackburn, Title III – English Learners
Rudyane Rivera-Lindstrom, Title III – English Learners
Jonathon Fernow, Title IC - Migrant Specialist

Oregon Department of Education – Office of Learning
Michelle McCoy – Assessment Specialist

Beaverton School District
Wei-Wei Lou, Director for ELL Services
Megan Clifford, Principal, McKay Elementary
Eve Berry, ESL/ Two- Way Immersion, Barnes Elementary
Ellen Knowles, ESL Facilitator, Barnes Elementary

Forest Grove School District
Leonard Terrible, ELL Coordinator

Reynolds School District
Ovidio Villarreal, Director of ELD & Federal Programs
Lynn Thompson, ELD Compliance Facilitator
Mike Clutter, Principal, Woodland Elementary
Larry Conley, Principal, Hartley Elementary
Lara Smith, Principal, Salish Ponds Elementary
Jill Sorenson, Principal, Troutdale Elementary
Stacy Talus, Principal, Reynolds Middle School
Mayra Gomez, Assistant Principal, Reynolds High School
Todd Klindt, Counselor, Reynolds High School

Salem Keizer School District
Sue Rieke-Smith, Director Instructional Services
Chrissy Chapman, Elementary ESOL/Bilingual Programs Coordinator

Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO)
Diana Pei Wu, Director of Organizing

Adelante Mujeres
Bridget Cooke, Executive Director
Cecilia Girón, Program Director, Adelante Chicas

Salem Keizer Coalition for Equality
Aurora Cedillo, Board Secretary
APPENDIX B

COMMON PARENT QUESTIONS

- What do all the acronyms mean?
- How are children placed in ELD?
- Why was my child placed in ELD again after he exited in another district/state?
- How is ELD instruction delivered?
- If my child leaves class to participate in ELD, what is she missing?
- How do I know if my child is advancing appropriately? How do I know if he’s ready to exit?
- If my child speaks better English than I do/ more English than Spanish/ English with her friends, why is she still in ELD?
- How can I get information from classroom teachers in conferences about ELD?
- Will my kids be ready to graduate?
- Could the teachers be missing that my child has a learning disability because they are assuming it is a language issue rather than an academic issue?

APPENDIX C

KEY STAGES FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT

- **When the student is enrolled in ELD**, to understand the teaching method and learn who will be monitoring the child’s English development.
- **When the Parent Placement Letter arrives in the fall**, to review the student’s ELPA level and instructional placement.
- **During the school year**, to monitor the student’s ELD progress through report cards, meetings and conferences in order to support their English learning.
- **After exit/reclassification**, to know who is monitoring the student and what criteria are being used to track their progress. With older students it is important to make sure they are earning the necessary credits to graduate on time.