

To: Dr. Susan Andrews, Governor's Office of Planning and Budget
From: Matt Jones, Chief of Staff, Georgia Department of Education
RE: ESOL Information
Date: July 8, 2015
Cc: Cori Alston, Pam Smith, Dr. Caitlin Dooley

To ensure that English Learners are provided the appropriate amount of ESOL service – neither more nor less than they require – the Georgia Department of Education (DOE) recommends that the FTE segments be tied to a student's *language proficiency level*, rather than grade level, with higher proficiency levels requiring fewer service segments.

Currently, ESOL FTE is based on a student's assigned grade level. English Learner (EL) in grades Kindergarten through 3rd receive one FTE segment of ESOL services per day. In 4th through 8th grade, ELs may receive up to two funded ESOL segments per day, and in high school this number increases to a maximum of five funded segments per day. The Georgia DOE ensures that no district claims more than these allowances via FTE reporting which collects and compares ESOL students' grade levels to the number of segments served in ESOL.

A comprehensive review of the current state ESOL funding rule may be in order. The funding structure currently allows multiple segments to be assigned to students in grades 4 through 12 with no regard to the students' actual service needs. Therefore, a high school EL with generally strong English skills can be assigned the full five ESOL segments, when in fact he may only need one or two in order to be successful. An unnecessarily ESOL-heavy schedule will impact his ability to take other required coursework and likely reduce the chances that he will graduate in a timely manner. Conversely, a third grade student with limited English and literacy skills is currently permitted only one segment of language support. His clear *need* for support, however, is much greater than the current funding policy allows.

Any revision of the current system would require several built-in safeguards, checks, and balances. Under ESEA, ESOL students are required to be annually assessed on their language proficiency. The assessment used in Georgia, called ACCESS for ELLs, has been in place since 2006. It is used by 35 states, and was administered to nearly 1.5 million English Learners last year. The ACCESS assessment is a valid, reliable, standards-based and nationally-normed assessment that assigns to each EL an English proficiency level score. Student scores are received at the Georgia DOE directly from the score reporting contractor and are imported into the Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS). Students whose scores reach the proficient level are exited from ESOL services and no longer generate state ESOL FTE. During the subsequent two-year monitoring period required by the federal government, if the student's Language Assessment Committee determine that language challenges continue to impact the student's learning, then that student may be re-classified as an EL and again included in ESOL FTE until exit.

This recommend change would reform our current age-based ESOL funding model into a need-based funding structure and, as most of our relevant data collections processes are already in place, could be easily monitored for compliance by the Georgia DOE. All parties involved, from students to teachers and administrators, have strong incentives to annually increase student language proficiency scores (which in this model would result in a decreasing level of service delivery) and exit students from ESOL services. The CCRPI, the Teacher Evaluation System, and federal Title III law all have requirements that ELs make pre-determined levels of annual progress in their English skills, and these are well-known and commonly understood EL accountability measures.