

Editorial
Indiana TESOL White Paper
Financial Earmarking: The Money Follows the Child

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Indiana's English learners (EL) is the fastest growing student constituency consisting of 93,625 students that represent 296 language backgrounds, and requiring language services. The EL population has grown by 85% from 2016 to 2024 (Indiana Department of Education, 2024) and 75% are born in the U.S., making them Indiana Hoosiers. Indiana's EL population is diverse with families contributing to corporations, universities, factories and farms. Districts serving ELs receive a per pupil amount in state funding and federal funding and such funds are used to provide required language services (Lau v. Nichols, 1974; Castañeda v. Pickard, 1981).

The currently proposed ESSA waiver authored by the Indiana Department of Education will impact how Title III dollars are distributed. Presently, when Title III is released from USDE to IDOE, the funds are distributed on a per pupil basis and districts must use those dollars for identified-English Learners. There are **safeguards** to ensure these funds are used for ELs and not reappropriated for local priorities that may thwart the legal rights of ELs. These distributions are protected to ensure they are "earmarked" for English Learners: The proposed ESSA waiver plan to move most Title funds, including Title III earmarked for ELs into a block grant states the following: 1) to advance student achievement; 2) to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the plan; and 3) to ensure continued provisions for the same populations. Indiana TESOL has grave concerns about how these dollars would be reappropriated and that changing present

language services for them would create the conditions for lowering achievement; limited capacity for oversight of these changes; and violation of federal and state laws.

Serving ELs in schools *requires* language services that are 1) research based; 2) adequately resourced; and 3) found to be effective (Castañeda v. Pickard, 1981). Funding for ELs comes from two main sources in Indiana: federal and state. For the federal, Title III funds that come from the Office of English Language Acquisition are nested within the U.S. Department of Education. The federal Title III dollars were already appropriated in the last Congressional session and are part of meeting the requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act and are appropriated per pupil/per EL (ESSA, 2015). This is a per pupil allocation, meaning the funds are earmarked for ELs. Our state funding source, the Non-English Speaking Program (NESP), was established in 1999 through legislation introduced by a state senator from Elkhart, Indiana, in response to the growing Latinx immigrant workforce in the region's RV industry (Morita-Mullaney, 2015). These federal and state sources for funding are earmarked; meaning they are specified for the audience that is identified as being an EL, similar to how we identify students who have special education needs. This funding is for them.

As dollars associated with Indiana students presently follows a per pupil amount and the money follows the child. We argue upon this same premise that *the money should follow the child*. Title III dollars are earmarked for English learners (the population). This financial decoupling from the child as proposed within the ESEA waiver discredits the argument of the money following the child.

History

- In the 2023 legislative session, the NESP funds were decoupled or unearmarked, meaning district leaders had to decide how to use such dollars. IDOE was no longer responsible for grants associated with NESP and thus, it was sent to the general fund. EL directors/leaders throughout the state reported the misuse of these funds and that they were not all used to serve EL populations, a violation of ESSA and other federal statutes.
- Current proposals would similarly decouple Title III funds into a block grant through the ESEA waiver, removing accountability safeguards and allowing districts to use the money for non-EL purposes.
- The last flexibility waiver under NCLB (2012–2015) redirected resources to the bottom quartile, disrupting EL programming and reducing legally required services. While ELs showed growth in the VAM model, they remained far behind, an outcome tied to diminished service delivery during that period.

Outcomes of Decoupling

- **Funding may go to non-public endeavors:** Because this waiver would allow a competition or application for funds, there is no guarantee this would go to public schools, opening up greater privatization creating issues for oversight ensuring that funds are actually used for students.
- **Erosion of language rights:** Decoupling funds undermines *Castaneda v. Pickard* (1981), which mandates that EL programs must be based on sound theory, implemented effectively, and evaluated for success. When EL funds are treated as discretionary or general-purpose revenue, students are deprived of the services necessary for linguistic and academic development, violating their rights. Additionally, districts and states can

face lawsuits and loss of federal funding for failing to meet the obligations of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

- **Declining achievement and future dropout of ELs:** Research consistently shows that when ELs are not adequately supported, they fall behind academically and are significantly more likely to score lower on state standardized assessments (Fry, 2007; NWEA, 2019). As a result, they are more likely to be placed in remedial or inappropriate special education tracks and more likely to drop out of high school before graduation (Artiles et al, 2005; NWEA, 2019). **This has direct economic consequences for the state.** Students who drop out of high school earn, on average, \$11,000 less per year than high school graduates and \$35,000 less compared to a college graduate (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025). Lower educational attainment correlates with higher rates of public assistance and incarceration. Therefore, the long-term GDP growth of the state is weakened when large segments of the future workforce are undereducated and underemployed.
- **Deprofessionalization of teaching:** When EL funding is decoupled, school administrators often shift funds away from specialized EL teachers, bilingual aides, or targeted professional development. This not only erodes the quality of services provided but also leads to layoffs of bilingual staff, overreliance on underprepared general education teachers, and burnout among remaining EL professionals, further contributing to the current educator shortage crisis.
- **The Educator Shortage Crisis:** The burnout and turnover experienced by teachers is made worse by the deprofessionalization of English Language (EL) teaching. Professional specialization is beneficial as it allows the division of roles among staff.

After such a division of roles occurs, there is always the possibility of monopolization, where remaining staff take on more responsibilities than they should, leading to overwork, a lack of adequate support, and burnout. This cycle of burnout is an expensive problem to address, and it is made worse as there is an ongoing stream of teachers leaving the profession. This results in a staffing crisis, which is more expensive to fix than simply upholding the original roles and responsibilities.

- **Increased abuse among districts who use it for what they will:** When EL-designated funds are used without oversight, districts may divert them to cover general budget gaps instead of building effective language programs. This leads to inconsistent services across districts, widens educational inequities, and creates an accountability gap where there are no consequences for failing to serve the students the funds were intended to support.

Broader Economic Costs of Undermining EL Funding

Investing in EL Education is a *pro-growth economic strategy* that supports workforce development, civic integration, and long-term fiscal stability. Conversely, failure to adequately support ELs through properly resourced and accountable programming carries both immediate educational costs and long-term economic consequences for Indiana.

English Learners are among the fastest-growing populations in Indiana schools, particularly in urban centers and rural regions tied to agriculture and manufacturing. According to the Indiana Department of Education, the number of EL students grew by over 50% between 2012 and 2022, a trend projected to continue given patterns of migration and workforce demand (Indiana Department of Education, 2024). These students represent not only an educational

constituency but a crucial share of Indiana's future workforce, especially in industries experiencing persistent labor shortages.

Many Indiana employers in healthcare, manufacturing, logistics, and service industries rely on a bilingual labor force. The Indiana Chamber of Commerce's *Indiana Vision 2025* report notes that language and cultural skills are essential for employers seeking to serve diverse clientele and expand into global markets (Indiana Chamber of Commerce, 2023). The Indiana Department of Workforce Development projects continued demand for bilingual workers across high-growth occupations, including healthcare support, transportation, and production (Indiana Department of Workforce Development, 2023). In healthcare, language barriers contribute to miscommunication, errors, and inequitable care; bilingual professionals help mitigate these risks and expand patient access (The Joint Commission, 2022). In manufacturing and logistics, industries foundational to Indiana's economy, English learners play key roles in production and distribution chains. In education, customer service, and public services, culturally responsive communication is increasingly expected and valued. Undermining EL education today limits these students' ability to meet the workforce needs of tomorrow.

Indiana TESOL Resolution

Indiana TESOL calls for the immediate dismissal of the ESEA flexibility waiver and the preservation of categorical, per-pupil funding for every English learner. This proven model ensures:

1. predictable consistency so districts can plan for staffing and resources;
2. guardrails/safeguards that ensure the dollars are being used specifically for ELs; and
3. sustaining compliance within federal and state statute for serving ELs.

Abandoning this model would dismantle critical protections, divert resources away from the students who need them most, and jeopardize the academic and economic future of Indiana's EL population. To conclude, we argue that the money continues to follow the child, honoring a long-standing model of effective language programming for Indiana's ELs and investment in Indiana's future.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Trish Morita-Mullaney is a Professor in Language and Literacy Education at Purdue University and holds a courtesy appointment in Asian American Studies program. Her research focuses on the intersections between language, gender and race and how this informs the identity acts of educators of multilingual communities. Guided by critical and feminist thought, she examines how these overlapping identities inform the logics of educational decision making for multilingual families.

Michelle C. S. Greene, Ph.D., is a Clinical Assistant Professor of Urban Teacher Education at Indiana University Indianapolis. Grounded in equity-centered and justice-driven practices, her work focuses on empowering linguistically and culturally diverse learners. She holds a Ph.D. in Literacy, Culture, and Language Education with a specialization in English as a New Language. Dr. Greene is an active leader in INTESOL, serving as the incoming Editor of the *Indiana TESOL Journal* and a longtime member of the Board of Directors. Her recent scholarship centers on transnational virtual global exchange programs, earning her the 2025 Virtual Global Learning Fellowship and a Mexico Program Development Grant. Through this work, she advances

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