

LONG-TERM ELs AND ADVOCATING FOR OUR SCHOLARS

Alexandra Horner

Second Vice President, LaTESOL

ESL Teacher, EBR Schools

I believe that the needs of marginalized individuals, especially those with limited English proficiency, should be on the forefront of the decisions made in education today. Our immigrant and refugee populations have increased significantly in the past decade, leaving our educational institutions scrambling to meet the needs of these learners. Oftentimes, we fall short. It is heartbreaking to witness our long term English learners (LTELs)- those multilingual scholars who struggle and stall in their linguistic growth trajectory, feeling especially helpless. LTELs are disengaged, unmotivated and resigned to failure. My goal as an educator is to break down the barriers that limit and/or complicate access to quality education so that these precious students can somehow gain the self agency necessary to attain success.

As we witness history in the making with the influx of immigrants coming into the United States, the lack of resources for them, and even the Supreme Court decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, we can anticipate the direct negative impact upon those most vulnerable in our society such as our LTELs. This group, especially those who are undocumented, cannot easily move state to state to find options- their language limits and economic status keeps them bound where they are. While we may not be able to control all the circumstances, it is our obligation as educators to intentionally provide the highest level of support and opportunities to help our LTELs become empowered with the knowledge, dignity and the self agency to be successful. This raises several critical questions that we must address:

- How are we promoting realistic optimism overall?
- How are we helping to connect our LTELs to community resources?
- Immigrant populations tend to be extremely insular, but do they have fluent literacy skills in their native language to be able to read flyers and other publications within their communities?
- Are these students and their families plugged in with vocational training to build work skills, social groups, and faith-based organizations?
- Are we really engaging with our LTELs and their families to ascertain what needs, desires and dreams they have?
- Talk isn't enough. We need to make sure that the relationships with their respective learning institutions are available and activated for LTELs. Not just the students we have now, but also their families. Every human reading this right now is implicated and charged. Time is short, and the time is now.