Debunking TESL Myths
Nevada English Mastery Council, TESL Subcommittee, 2019

MYTH	FACT
1. All ELs are immigrants and born outside of the U.S.	While some ELs are immigrants and newcomers to the U.S., the majority of ELs enrolled in U.S. schools were born in the U.S. In 2017-2018 Nevada's English Language Learner (ELL) enrollment was 81,655 total students or 16.82% of the student population. The majority of EL students are United States born (85% of elementary age and 62% of secondary age) (Zong & Batalova, 2015). Home language and home language practices indicate little about an English learner student's nationality, citizenship, or country of origin (Capps et al., 2005). Spanish is the dominant first language of EL students (62%) and other languages such as Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Tagalog, and others are also represented. By 2025, one in four public school students will be designated as EL (Zong & Batalova, 2015). The number of children from immigrant families in Nevada was 254,00 in 2016 (Children in immigrant families in Nevada) Sources: Nevada Report Card.; Zong, J., & Batalova, J. (2015). *The limited English proficient population in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: Migration Policy Institute. Capps, R., Fix, M., Murray, J., Ost, J., Passel, J., & Herwantoro, S. (2005). *The new demography of America's schools: Immigration and the No Child Left Behind Act*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute. The Annie E. Casey Foundation: Kids Count Data Center - Special populations: ELL in Nevada
2. Until students learn English, there is no point in trying to teach them content area subjects.	ELs need to learn academic content as they develop English. It is recommended and desirable to teach English learners academic content while they are acquiring English. Content-based instruction should be coupled with strategies for developing language acquisition to obtain optimal success among ELs. Source: Peregoy, S. F., & Boyle, O. F. (2016). *Reading, writing, and learning in ESL: A resource for teaching K-12 English learners* (7th). New York City, NY: Pearson Education Inc.; Dominguez, M., & Gutierrez, K. (2019) Best practices for teaching dual language learners: Leveraging everyday literacies. In L. Morrow & L. Gambrell (Eds.), *Best practices in literacy instruction* (6th ed., pp. 127-149). New York: Guilford. For suggestions on how to support ELs with reading and content, see Breiseth, L. (2010). Reading comprehension strategies for English Language Learners, *ASCD Express, 5* (11). Reading Comprehension Strategies for English Language Learners
3. Teachers should discourage students from speaking their native language, as this practice will hinder their English language development.	As students use their native language and English, their cognitive and academic growth is facilitated. Speaking their native language with their parents is important and should be respected and encouraged. Bilingualism is an asset to an individual and should be encouraged. Source: Saville-Troike, M., & Barto, K. (2016*). Introducing second language acquisition* (3rd). United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press; Myths and Realities: Best Practices for ESL Students; Faulstich Orellana, M. (2009). *Translating childhoods: Immigrant youth, language, and culture.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. Iddings, A., Combs, M., & Moll, L. (2012). In the arid zone: Drying out educational resources for English language learners through policy and practice. *Urban Education 47*, 495-514.; WIDA - ABCs of Family Engagement
4. English-language proficiency is an indicator of intellect and academic proficiency.	Can an English-language learner be academically gifted? Most certainly! He or she can also have learning differences, although they cannot be identified until language issues are ruled out. While it may be difficult to distinguish between a language difference or a learning disability, it's crucial that instruction is provided that maximizes comprehensible input and draws on the experiences of students in order to maximize understanding. Furthermore, assessments are not valid if students do not understand the questions, although they may be assimilating the material.

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	Source: 10 Assumptions to Rethink About English-Language Learners; Gutierrez, K. (2012). Re-mediating current activity for the future. *Mind, Culture, and Activity: An International Journal 19*, 17-21.
5. English immersion results in faster English language acquisition for all English Learners.	Instruction in a student's native language facilitates the acquisition of English. Children need a strong, fluent foundation in their first language in order to succeed in English. English immersion programs are not effective for students who have limited native language and literacy skills. Dual language programs can provide an effective instructional approach that supports second language acquisition and content area knowledge, and maintains the child's native language Source: Bilingual Education or English Immersion? Which are the best ESL Teaching Method?; Dominguez, M., & Gutierrez, K. (2019) Best practices for teaching dual language learners: Leveraging everyday literacies. In L. Morrow & L. Gambrell (Eds.), *Best practices in literacy instruction* (6th ed., pp. 127-149). New York: Guilford.
6. Younger children are more effective language learners than older learners.	While younger language learners may learn to pronounce a new language with little or no accent, older language learners are often much more efficient learners. Language expectations for younger learners are generally lower than for older students. School language is more complex and less contextualized at higher grades, making language acquisition challenging. Sources: Birdsong, D., & Park, J. (2008). Second language acquisition and ultimate attainment. In B. Spolsky & F. Hult (Eds.), *The handbook of educational linguistics* (pp. 424-436). Malden, MA: Blackwell; Myths and Realities: Best Practices; Goldenberg, C. (2008). Teaching English language learners. *American Educator*, 8-44.
7. ELs are fluent in their native language.	It's not uncommon for children to replace their first language with English, especially international adoptees. Because they have no one in the home to converse with in their native tongues, they forget everything they learned as young children. However, many of them still have difficulty understanding and producing English. These students will not need a translator, but they most definitely need scaffolding and differentiation. Source: 10 Assumptions to Rethink About English-Language Learners; Bilingual Students Need Support in Their Native Language; August, D., & Fenner, D. (2014). *Scaffolding instruction for English language learners: A resource guide for English Language Arts*. Center for English Language Learners at American Institute for Research. Engage, NY: Our Students.
8. Using a push-in model will guarantee an increase in collaboration and opportunities for success for ELs.	"Push-in" refers to a program model in which an English language teacher provides English language support in the general classroom with content instruction instead of a separate classroom, referred to as the pull-out model. The push-in model aims to provide inclusive services to English Learners. While it may seem like a better model because it's "inclusive", providing services to ESL students in a push-in model does not automatically guarantee high quality language services. Just having an EL teacher in the room with the classroom teacher does not lead to meaningful collaboration and quality services for ELs. All instructional models need to begin with an analysis of the student needs, close examination of EL achievement data, outcomes desired and a review of a variety of models, approaches, and strategies that will be used to attain the goals. A Push-in model should be collaborative, with co-instructors meeting regularly, planning instruction and assessment, and evaluating the English learner's progress. Sources: Peregoy, S. F., & Boyle, O. F. (2016). *Reading, writing, and learning in ESL: A resource for teaching K-12 English learners* (7th). New York City, NY: Pearson Education Inc, Inc.; Source: Eight English Learner Myths for Administrators

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9. ELs no longer need language support once they meet language program exit criteria.	Language development is a long-term process. Language demands increase through the years of schooling, beyond the "exit" stage. As a result, ELs may require attention to their language needs even after exiting the EL program for several reasons. If the exit criteria are not rigorous and aligned to success in content areas, ELs will need further support to be successful in the academic areas. Also, if ELs exit at the end of their elementary school, they might show signs of needing support in middle school due to the increase of the language demands in middle and high school. For more on this topic, read Much More Than Reclassification by Ruslana and Luciana de Oliveira, Ph.D. Source: Eight English Learner Myths for Administrators
10. ELs automatically means "struggling students" and therefore, ELs cannot be successful in gifted and talented programs or advanced coursework due to their "limited" English language skills.	Just because English Learners are learning English, it does not mean they are struggling students. Many are high achieving or exhibit achievement in areas not traditionally identified. Understanding giftedness among culturally diverse learners will require a new lens. "School districts may not categorically exclude EL students from gifted and talented education (GATE) or other specialized programs such as Advanced Placement (AP), honors, or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses. Unless a particular GATE program or advanced course is demonstrated to require proficiency in English for meaningful participation, schools must ensure that evaluation and testing procedures for GATE or other specialized programs do not screen out EL students because of their limited English proficiency." (Dear Colleague Letter: EL Students and Limited English Proficient Parents) Source: Eight English Learner Myths for Administrators
11. If the ESL teacher could take the student more often and just focus on teaching the English language to ESL students, learning in all areas would occur faster.	Language is a developmental process and it takes time; consistent, cognitive development in all subject areas is as important as hours of ESL instruction. Students can learn language and content simultaneously; classroom teachers providing comprehensible input are important to academic success and to language learning. The ESL teacher can provide an opportunity for the student to be immersed in language at the appropriate level and can help students develop language skills and language learning strategies efficiently. Source: Myths and Realities: Best Practices
12. Researchers cannot agree on important components of effective programs for English learners.	Researchers agree that an effective program for English learners must value the cultural identity of the student, have high expectations, integrate language and content, support whole school inclusion, promote collaboration among educators, and provide ongoing professional development and support for teachers. Additionally, instruction should be comprehensible to all learners; be interactive; connect school to students' lives; promote cross-cultural understanding; develop language and literacy across the Curriculum; help all students achieve learning outcomes Source: Myths and Realities: Best Practices; Wright, W. E. (2015). *Foundations for teaching English language learners: Research, Theory, Policy, and Practice* (2nd). Philadelphia, PA: Caslon Publishing;