



Responding to Policy shifts between Federal and State Responsibility

October 13, 2026

Webinar Guest Speaker:

Dr. Trish Morita-Mullaney

Professor of Language and Literacy, Purdue University

Webinar Overview:

Among the many momentous changes in education policy in recent months, one key stated initiative of the US Department of Education has been the policy of “returning education to the states.” In this webinar, we take a deep dive into how this initiative is playing out, exploring the on-the-ground impact of these changes for multilingual learners. We examine the impacts of the transition in the policy landscape with the diminished federal role, and consider how the vacuum left by the federal agency negatively affects the services afforded to multilingual students. We also consider ways in which states have stepped in to shore up support for these students.

CAL Disclaimer

The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) provides research-informed guidance to support equitable and effective education for multilingual learners. This document is intended for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice.



@Center_for_Applied_Linguistics



info@cal.org



www.cal.org

Key Insights

- Rapid recent policy changes have resulted in a hugely diminished role of the US federal government, including the US Department of Education.
- The US Department of Education has stated this explicitly under the initiative of “returning education to the states.”
- States’ approaches to these changes vary widely from context to context.

Policy Implications

- The US Department of Education has encouraged states to seek waivers to specific elements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act – states have responded by seek waivers to accountability provisions for student subgroups, including multilingual learners, and waivers for formula grant requirements.
- States have also proposed policies and legislation that undercut the right to free public education for undocumented students.
- Some states have responded by explicitly shoring up protections for undocumented students, enshrining these protections in state-level legislation.

Calls to Action

- Know the current protections afforded to undocumented students
- Watch for state-level changes or challenges and connect with local and national advocates
- Critically examine your own state and district-level policies that protect the civil rights of multilingual students

Resources

- EdWeek Tracker: [Which States Are Challenging Undocumented Students’ Right to Free Education?](#)
- [ESSA Waiver Watch](#) (developed by All4Ed , EdTrust , and National Parents Union)
- [How Essa Waivers Put English Learners at Risk](#) (EdTrust and UnidosUS)
- EdWeek article: [What ‘Returning Ed. to the States’ Looks Like as the Ed. Dept. Awards Grants](#)

CAL Disclaimer

The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) provides research-informed guidance to support equitable and effective education for multilingual learners. This document is intended for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice.



@Center_for_Applied_Linguistics



info@cal.org



www.cal.org