

## SUPPORTING ENGLISH LEARNERS IN ENGLISH-ONLY CLASSROOMS

### Using Translation Tools to Bridge Understanding and Boost Equity

In states with English-only instruction laws, teachers may wonder how to support English Learners (ELs) without violating policy. The good news, translation tools can be used—as long as English remains the language of instruction. When paired with strong immersion strategies, these tools support understanding, confidence, and academic success.

#### Why Use Translation Tools:

- **Boost Comprehension** - Clarifying key terms and directions helps ELs stay engaged, and reduces frustration.
- **Build Confidence** - Students are more likely to participate and take risks when they feel supported.
- **Accelerate Language Learning** - Students make connections between their home language and English, vocabulary, and structures.
- **Promote Equity** - Translation tools ensure access to rigorous instruction for all students, regardless of language background.

#### Classroom Best Practices:

- Use tools for word/phrase clarification, not as the main mode of instruction.
- Pair tools with visuals, modeling, sentence frames, and peer interaction.
- Set expectations for reduced use over time as language skills grow.
- Encourage at-home use for homework and family communication.

#### Bottom Line:

Translation tools are not a crutch—they're a bridge. When used well, they help students thrive academically and grow as English speakers.

#### NOTE

Translation tools are supports, not replacements for English instruction. Their use aligns with English-only laws when instruction remains in English—and with federal civil rights laws that require equitable access for ELs.



## Research & Evidence

- Research supports the strategic use of translation tools as part of a comprehensive approach to English language instruction. According to a 2017 study published in the *Journal of Educational Psychology*, bilingual glossaries and translation aids can improve comprehension and content retention without impeding English acquisition.
- The U.S. Department of Education's Office for English Language Acquisition (OELA) also emphasizes that while instruction must be in English in certain states, schools are still required under federal law (Title VI of the Civil Rights Act) to take 'affirmative steps' to ensure ELs can meaningfully participate in educational programs.
- Additionally, a 2020 study by the Migration Policy Institute found that when ELs had access to translation tools in early stages of learning, they developed a stronger academic vocabulary and performed better on standardized assessments over time.

Translation tools are most effective when combined with immersion techniques such as scaffolded instruction, visual supports, and structured peer interaction—ensuring that students can not only access the content, but also build long-term language proficiency.

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