



Supporting parents for successful emergent bilingual remote learning

INTRODUCTION

Across the country, the pandemic has forced everyone—educators, administrators, students, and parents—to adapt to remote learning. While each district’s learning model may look different, from fully in-person to fully remote, each school is most likely incorporating some form of remote learning for those students who need it.

As a result, educators and administrators must reevaluate the ways in which they’re engaging emergent bilingual students, or English language learners, and assess what’s needed to ensure their success.

Emergent bilinguals are one of the fastest-growing segments among school-age children in the US, projected to account for 25% of the total K–12 enrollment by 2025 (NEA, 2019). Despite these growing numbers, however, as a group, emergent bilinguals statistically underperform their non-emergent bilingual counterparts.

During the 2015–16 academic year, for example, only 67% of emergent bilinguals, versus 85% of non-emergent bilinguals, graduated from high school on time (USDOE, 2015). Emergent bilinguals also represent less than 3% of students in gifted and talented education nationwide and are underrepresented in gifted programs in almost every state (Sparks & Harwin, 2017).

The pandemic may exacerbate this achievement gap, as some experts estimate that students will lose 30% of their annual reading gains and up to 50% of their math gains due to the “COVID slide” (Lazarin, 2020).

Thus, engaging emergent bilinguals in remote learning will be paramount. A key component of emergent bilingual success is parent/caregiver involvement, as research connects increased parent engagement to better student attitudes, improved academic performance, and a reduction in dropout rates (NEA, 2019).

But parents are now faced with more challenges than ever before, as they work to maintain jobs and other responsibilities while also managing their children’s remote learning. In this white paper, we’ll review what’s needed for successful emergent bilingual remote learning and discuss ways in which educators and administrators can best support parents and caregivers for better outcomes.



2x

Emergent bilinguals are **two times** more likely to drop out than native and fluent English speakers (Amos, 2013).

WHAT'S NEEDED FOR SUCCESSFUL REMOTE LANGUAGE LEARNING

The transition to remote learning has presented new barriers to engagement for emergent bilingual students, including uneven access to technology, spotty Wi-Fi connections, lack of adult supervision, and/or additional family responsibilities (Goldstein, et al., 2020). Beyond addressing the material needs of emergent bilinguals—e.g., distributing tablets or Chromebooks and providing WiFi hotspots—**here are three additional components** of a successful remote learning plan for emergent bilinguals.

1. Opportunities for speaking practice

Ultimately, to learn a language, students have to speak it, and plenty of research supports this. Students who talk more in the classroom demonstrate greater learning, and students have been shown to be more engaged when they're participating in group discussions or actively presenting (Fisher, Frey & Rothenberg, 2008; Yair, 2000). For language learning specifically, speaking is critical for practice and feedback (Swain, 1995).

Without the in-person classroom experience to encourage speaking, educators will have to rely on educational technology, which has proven to be beneficial for language learning (Golonka, et al., 2014). Programs that incorporate speech recognition technology, such as Rosetta Stone® English, can provide opportunities for practice and pronunciation feedback in a safe, nonjudgmental space while students are at home. Remote small group meetings organized by level can also help educators facilitate speaking practice for these students.

2. Real-time data to monitor progress

During remote learning, real-time data—provided by an educational technology solution—is essential. When educators aren't with their students in person or seeing them as much over Zoom or Google Meet, real-time data can show them whether progress is being made. It can also tell them which areas are especially challenging for students so that instruction can be targeted.

3. Parent engagement and the use of heritage language

When parents are involved in their children's education at home, they do better in school, and when parents are involved in school, children go further in school (TESOL, 2018). Encouraging students and parents to use their heritage language can be an effective strategy that increases comprehension and validates the student's identity. It can also help them acquire academic language skills. In fact, allowing students to formalize grammatical structures in their heritage language *maximizes* learning and helps them acquire English more effectively (Genesee, 2010; Gil & Bardack, 2010).



HOW EDUCATORS CAN BETTER SUPPORT EMERGENT BILINGUAL PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

During this period of remote learning, parents and caregivers need more support than ever before. Their involvement is a key component of emergent bilingual success, yet the challenges they face are many. **Here are six things** educators can do to support them for better student outcomes.

1.

Find out how and when families prefer to communicate

Two-way communication is even more important during remote learning, and each emergent bilingual family may have their own preferred way to communicate. Educators can find out what works best for each family with a quick informal survey. Translation apps, like Talking Points, will also be helpful, as will additional resources, like translation services and/or a translation hotline offered by schools or districts (Breiseth, 2020).

2.

Understand family expectations and needs

During this period of remote learning, it's especially important for educators to find out what emergent bilingual parents and caregivers expect and need from them. One way to do this is to ask parents to write them an email, sharing their hopes for their student.

Teaching remotely makes it more challenging for educators to get to know their students—and to do so as quickly—so parents should also be encouraged to share details about their student's personality, interests, and strengths. This can start the year on a positive note and provide useful insights about the family (Breiseth, 2019; Robertson, 2020).

3.

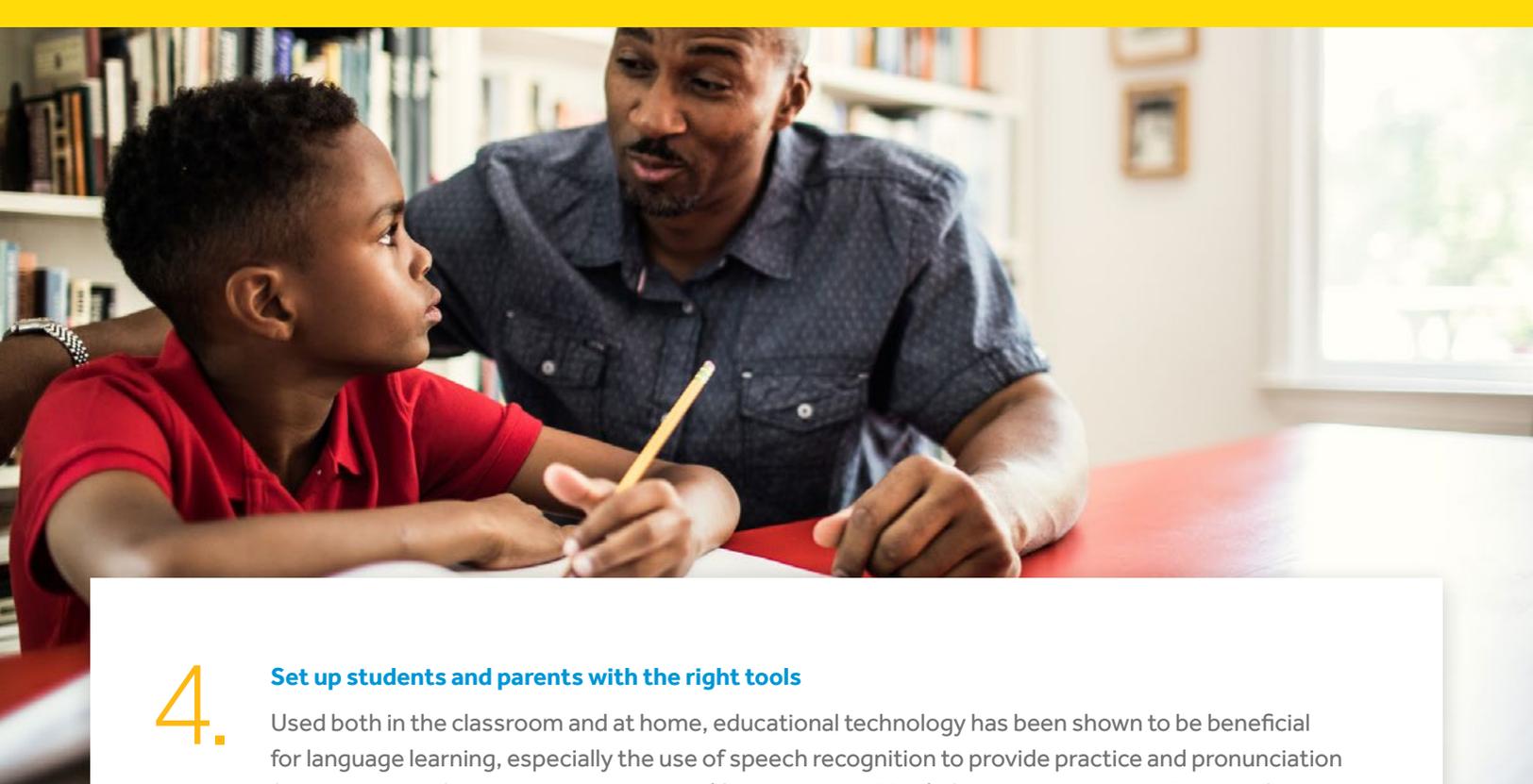
Encourage the use of heritage language

As discussed earlier, educators should encourage parents to harness and use their heritage language with students while at home. Meta-analyses have shown that educational programs that incorporate the use of emergent bilinguals' heritage language result in levels of academic success—in literacy and other academic subjects—that are as high as or better than those of emergent bilinguals in English-only programs (Genesee, 2010).

Extensive research has also found that emergent bilingual students are able to transfer many skills from their first language to facilitate their acquisition of reading skills in the second language. Studies of emergent bilinguals in the US show that students with strong reading skills in their heritage language also have strong reading skills in their second language (Genesee, 2010).

During remote learning, parents should be encouraged to speak in their heritage language using complete sentences and correct grammar (e.g., *usted* vs. *tu* in Spanish); read with their learners; watch educational programs in their heritage language; and use this as an opportunity to learn English themselves, to set an example for their children (Genesee, 2010; Krashen, 2020).

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4. **Set up students and parents with the right tools**

Used both in the classroom and at home, educational technology has been shown to be beneficial for language learning, especially the use of speech recognition to provide practice and pronunciation feedback in a safe, nonjudgmental space (Golonka et al., 2014). One such program is Rosetta Stone English, which uses speech recognition technology and immediate, corrective feedback to help students build linguistic confidence in academic English.

While choosing an intuitive, easy-to-use program is preferable, during this period of remote learning, online tech training sessions led by educators can help parents familiarize themselves with the technology in order to better support their students (Breiseth, 2020).

5. **Build on family strengths and cultural knowledge**

Now that many students are engaged in school from home, it's important to focus on the resources that are available to them versus the ones that aren't. Parents and caregivers are a resource that educators can build on.

Educators can provide suggestions for parents regarding how to support their emergent bilinguals' oral language development through daily activities at home. This includes informal, offline lessons, such as asking the student to tell a story using all of their languages; sharing family stories; including the student in household chores, like cooking and following a recipe; reading together in both languages; turning the captions on when watching TV; and so on (Skelton & Allen, 2020).

6. **Keep parents up to date on student progress**

During remote learning, it will be challenging for parents/caregivers to know whether their students are making progress, and at an appropriate level. Scheduling regular check-ins with emergent bilingual parents via the communication channel agreed upon can help parents ensure their students are staying on track.

A technology solution like Rosetta Stone English can also provide the data educators need to determine how much progress their students are making, while giving them reports to share with parents during check-ins.



HOW ADMINISTRATORS CAN SUPPORT EMERGENT BILINGUALS' PARENTS

Administrators play an important role in supporting emergent bilinguals' parents/caregivers during remote learning. Here are three ways they can help ensure parents and students are set up for success.

1. **Make translation services more accessible**

It's critical for all parents and caregivers to be able to access the information they need to stay up to date, regardless of heritage language. Administrators should consider setting up a translation hotline or subscribing to a commercial translation service. There are also tools that can help districts fill gaps in translation services, such as apps (e.g., Talking Points) that can translate messages between teachers and families (Ed Trust, 2020).

2. **Provide educators with the support they need**

In order to set up parents/caregivers and students for success, it's essential to start with educators. Administrators must provide their educators with the tools and communication methods they need to support parents. Administrators must also ensure their educators have the time they need to communicate effectively with emergent bilingual families by building it into their weekly schedules (Breiseth, 2020).

3. **Choose the right EdTech solution**

As administrators evaluate the educational technology solutions their district or schools are using to support remote learning, they should also consider tools specifically designed for emergent bilinguals. The following questions can be used to assess how well a program supports emergent bilingual students.

- Does it support educational equity?
- Is it culturally responsive for better student engagement?
- Does it blend English language learning with academic content areas, like science, math, history, etc.?
- Does it offer continuing progress monitoring or assessment?
- Does it combine online and offline instruction?
- Can it be individualized or personalized for each student?
- Does it offer corrective feedback?
- Does it provide ongoing, actionable data and reports?
- Is it easy to implement and use?



CONCLUSION

For emergent bilingual students and their families, the transition to remote learning has shed new light on educational inequities, while presenting new barriers to engagement, from uneven access to technology to newfound family responsibilities (Goldstein et al., 2020). Beyond meeting students' material needs, administrators and educators must also consider new and different ways to reach and engage emergent bilinguals.

A key component of student engagement is parent/caregiver involvement—and parents are no doubt more involved in their students' education than ever before. Therefore, educators and administrators must find ways to better support them.

Ultimately, developing strong relationships with emergent bilingual families, providing the right educational technology tools, and keeping the lines of communication open will make all the difference—as together, educators and parents navigate a new way forward, creating better outcomes for all.



Say hello to **Rosetta Stone English**, an adaptive blended learning speaking and listening program for grades K–6 that supports English language development.

Learn more at
www.rosettastone.com/k12/solutions/elementary-english-language



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