

District leaders work to improve education for English Language Learners

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BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) – Leaders from the biggest school systems in New York State came together at Lafayette High School in Buffalo Friday to call for changes that they say will help them better serve English Language Learners.

In the Buffalo school district, about 13 percent of students require those services. “We are delighted in the growth in that population here in Buffalo,” said Buffalo superintendent Dr. Kriner Cash. “We see them as our true talent and assets for our community, but we have a way to go before we can say that we are providing the kind of high quality and equal and high quality education for all of our students.”

It takes time for English Language Learners to get to the highest level of proficiency — about six years on average — and it takes resources that a lot of schools in the state don’t have. A lot of ELL students are falling through the gaps.

“In 2015, only 25 percent of limited English proficient students in the Buffalo Public School district graduated high school. It’s unacceptable,” said State Sen. Tim Kennedy. That’s a problem across the state and that’s why the district leaders from the Conference of Big 5 School Districts, which include Buffalo, New York City, Rochester, Syracuse, Yonkers, and Utica, came together Friday morning to try to get results for their ELL students. “We need to make sure that we welcome them and that we provide the support that they need to be successful,” said Syracuse interim superintendent Jaime Alicea, who was an English Language Learner himself.

The Conference of Big 5 School Districts has submitted recommendations to the state department of education, which include, among other things, requests for more funding from the state and local governments as well as changes to the testing protocols, so newcomers can spend less time sitting for standardized tests and more time learning. The Big 5 leaders also say they need to get more translators and bilingual teachers in the classrooms.

“We are not creating programs, we are providing services. Not any different from any service that we provide to any of our young people,” said Dr. Edwin Quezada, superintendent of Yonkers Public Schools. “Let’s take care of those young people. If we take care of them, we are taking care of America.”

The state lawmakers who spoke Friday morning say they’re hopeful funding for the Big 5’s recommendations can come through in the upcoming state budget process.

[Link to article and TV coverage: District leaders work to improve education](#)