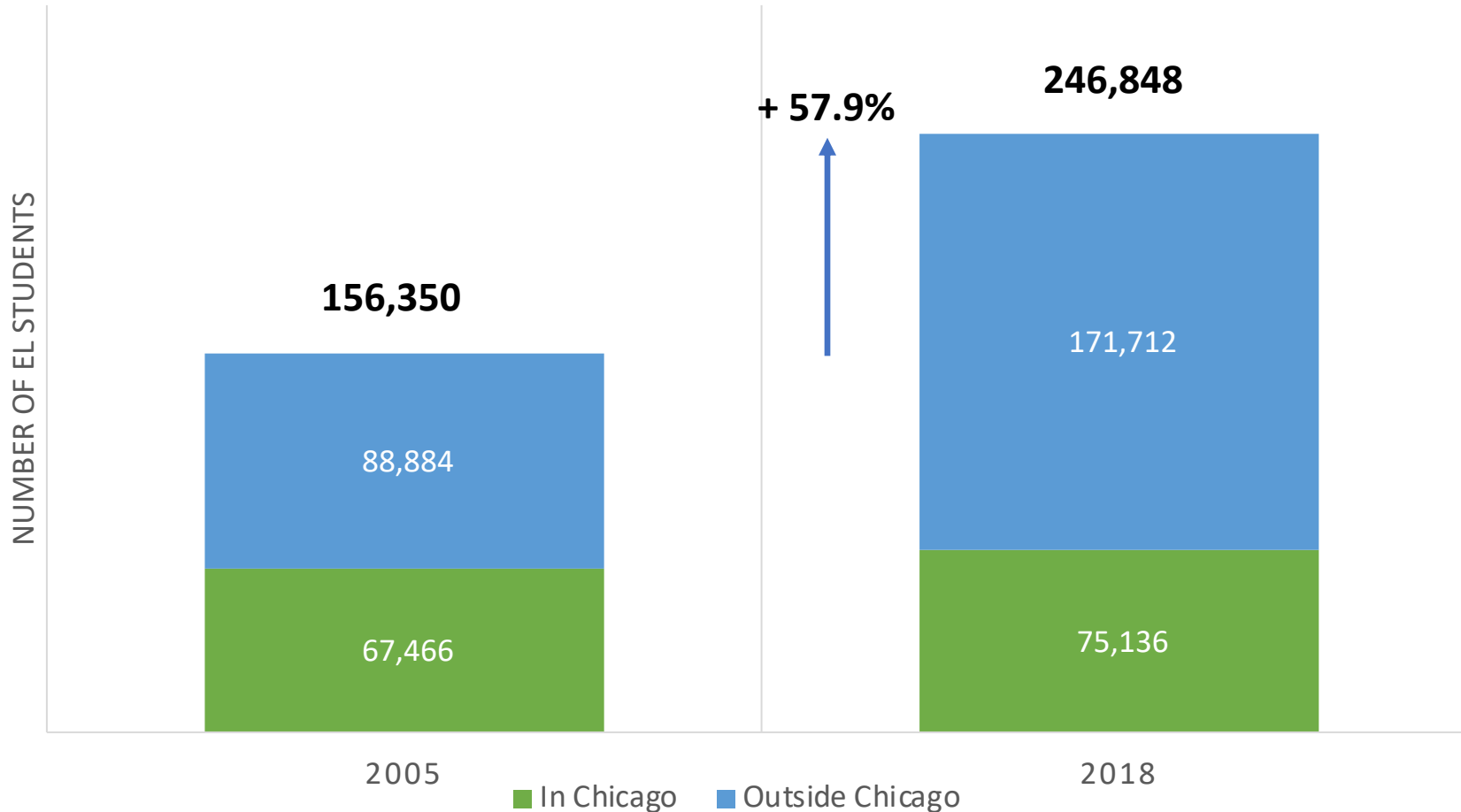


**English Learners and
the COVID Pandemic:
Prioritizing
Developmentally
Appropriate Practice
that Values Language
and Cultural Diversity**



Increase in Number of ELs in and Outside Chicago Between 2005 and 2018



Within Illinois:

- **63% of ELs** concentrated in **PreK-3rd grade**
- **28%** of preschoolers are EL
- **136** language represented, **71%** Spanish-speaking
- **50%** of children of immigrant parents live in low-income families

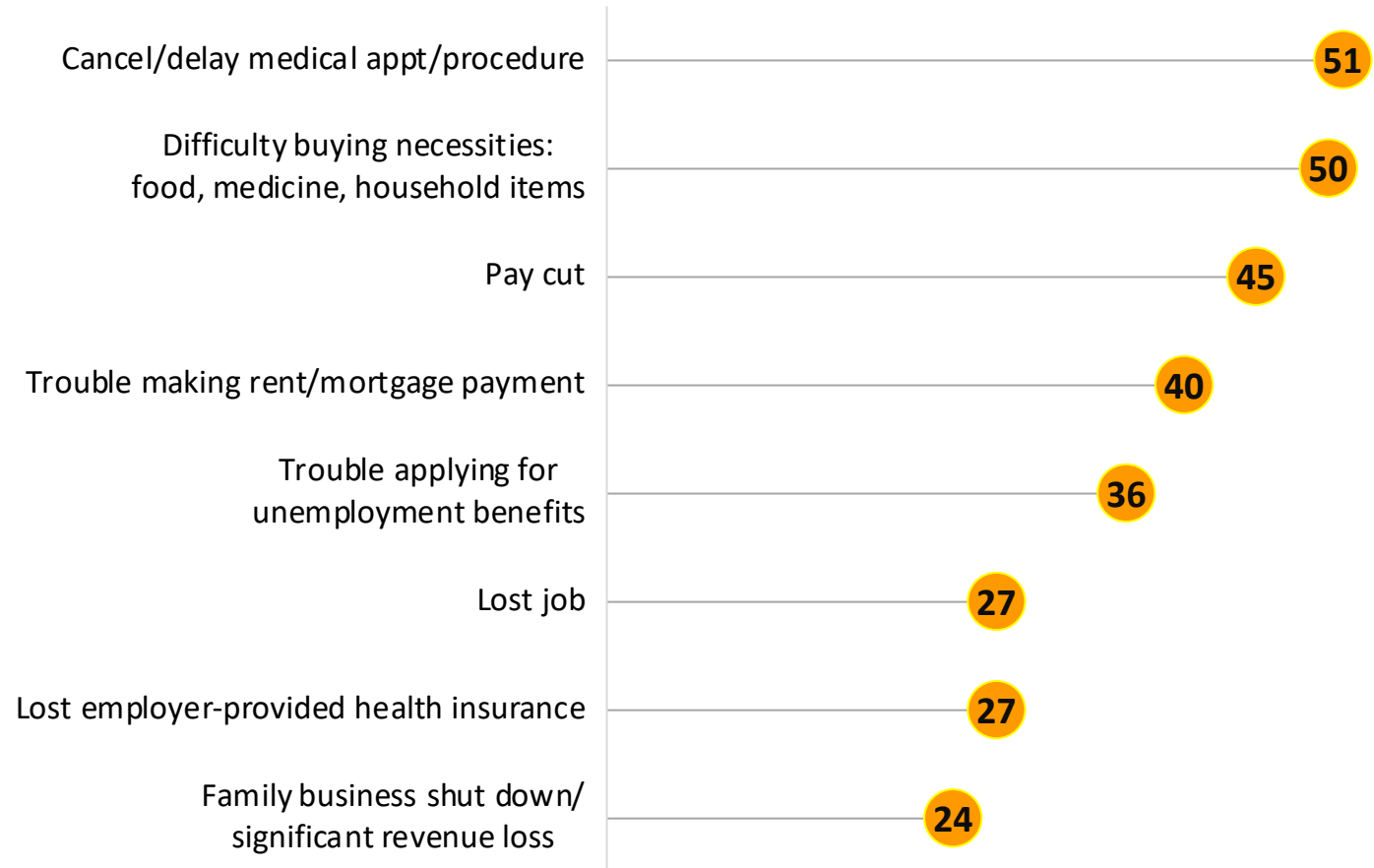
Huge Personal Financial Losses and Stress

(Which of these circumstances are true for you/household due to coronavirus outbreak? Percent “yes” illustrated)

58% of Latino households in Illinois have experienced either a job loss or a pay cut. 15% had BOTH job losses and pay cuts.

More than one out of four (27%) of Latino households in Illinois have experienced job loss.

27% have lost their employer-provided health insurance.



Hard Hits to Latino Parents in Illinois with Children in School

- 81% of Latino parents in Illinois worry their kids are falling behind because they've missed so much school.
- 46% attempted to act as the home-school teacher to their children as schools went online.
- 36% indicate online school has been difficult due to technical problems
- 30% do not have enough computer equipment to accommodate everyone in the home who is now working and going to school online.

Preliminary Recommendation Development

- **Intended audience:** community-based and school leaders charged with making budgetary decisions for EL education across preK-3rd grade settings. For schools, this can include board members, superintendents, Chief Executive Officers, curriculum directors, business officials/Chief Financial Officers, and EL program directors.
- Funders and decision-makers will also find these preliminary ideas useful for supporting EL achievement.

**As we navigate uncharted territory, the Forum is continually consulting with various stakeholders. All preliminary recommendations are subject to change.*

Overarching Preliminary Recommendations

- **Recommendation # 1:** Partner with community organizations to provide the basic needs and wrap around services to support vulnerable immigrant communities.
- **Recommendation # 2:** Develop plans for developmentally appropriate remote learning that is both digital- and non-digital.
- **Recommendation # 3:** Districts must prioritize family engagement and communication efforts—both virtually and in-person—that are responsive to the unique needs of linguistically and culturally diverse communities.
- **Recommendation # 4:** Develop and implement short- and long-term technology plans to promote equitable on-line learning opportunities for low-income immigrant communities.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Partner with community organizations to provide the basic needs and wrap around services to support vulnerable immigrant communities. Young students cannot learn if their basic needs and emotional health is not attended to. Young EL students are facing unprecedented challenges given the pandemic. Often their parents and caregivers are essential workers, living in communities with food insecurity, language barriers, and parents who do not have the formal education to support their child's educational needs. Educational approaches must prioritize the whole child. Trauma-informed practices and socio-emotional supports must be sensitive to the experience of young learners growing up in these communities.

Preliminary Recommendation #1



Ideas for Practice and Potential Areas of Investment

- Develop an intake survey for families, as suggested by ISBE guidance. The survey should serve as a needs-assessment.
- Conduct surveys in a family's home language.
 - Develop a list of bilingual personnel working with different families to coordinate comprehensive outreach.
 - Obtain consent from parents in their home language to provide mental health services to students before the beginning of the school year.
 - Assign bilingual staff to frequently update family contact information and emergency contacts.
- Use survey data to guide district planning and resource investment, with particular attention to mental health, nutritional, and transportation needs.
- Survey community organizations and religious institutions in the area to ascertain services and supports provided in the wider community.
 - Consult with PFAE programs that typically have robust wrap around services established to build on existing partnerships.
 - Develop Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with local community organizations to coordinate service delivery and referrals.
- Ensure that eligibility for services is communicated to undocumented families.
- Create a dissemination plan that includes various strategies to reach vulnerable families: e.g. flyers at food bank or signs at local grocery stores.
- Develop an on-line resource guide in multiple languages that connects families to programs and services Include:
 - food pantries
 - basic toiletries

Preliminary Recommendation #1



Ideas for Practice and Potential Areas of Investment Cont'd

- Create mental health/student support service teams (school counselor, social worker, community mental health partners) to develop a plan to support staff and students that is responsive to cultural and language diversity.
 - Information provided to families on services needs to be organized by region and areas of focus (i.e. languages available, ages served, eligibility criteria, possible fees, etc.)
 - Supports should be provided to both students and the staff who serve them.
- Utilize attendance data and log-in participation data to gauge student participation in school. Develop strategic interventions to boost attendance.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Develop plans for developmentally appropriate remote learning that are both digital- and non-digital. Practitioners are seeking comprehensive professional development opportunities specific to teaching young ELs in the pandemic: optimal virtual formats for language and content development, linguistically and culturally responsive socio-emotional learning opportunities, and best practice for connecting with families. The medical field and child development field need to come together to develop recommendations to guide best practice in remote learning for the young child. Guidance from these experts would form the foundation for professional development.

Preliminary Recommendation #2



Ideas for Practice and Potential Areas of Investment

- Provide professional development for teachers on developmentally appropriate virtual remote learning, with particular attention for preschool to third grade where English Learners are concentrated.
- Engage experts from the medical field, early childhood research, and early elementary to guide this training. Guidance should address:
 - Elevate the use of home language.
- Create an appropriate ESL and home language allocation model for digital learning.
- Provide an array of resources available in home languages of ELs (e.g. [Dual Language Network Facebook](#) out of New Mexico).
- Develop a plan for how resource teachers provide targeted instruction to ELs as part of the overall remote learning plan. Their time with students could be scheduled separately from full classroom instruction, but this has to be coordinated with lead teacher.

How often and for how long should young children be exposed to screen time?

What types of virtual activities are the most beneficial?

How can play-based learning be emphasized in both digital and non-digital formats?

What is the role of the adult caregiver in mediating these experiences for the young child?

How can the home language of the EL student be supported through virtual platforms?

Preliminary Recommendation #2



- Co-develop professional development opportunities with technology teachers, specifically related to the different platforms available for virtual learning.
 - Develop an internal internet site staff can access that is continually updated with resources for families, support with technology, and other tools needed to support distance learning. Use this resource for teachers to provide insights on what has worked well and to share best practice ideas.
 - Conduct trainings to help teachers record their remote lessons and send to children who are unable to access virtual meetings.
 - Provide varied opportunities for educators to trouble-shooting technology questions and provide technical assistance.
- Provide professional development on effective student hands-on activities during remote learning.
 - How can educators use objects that families already have in the home to promote learning? Examples include: space for learning, native language and cultural traditions, oral storytelling, etc.
 - How can teachers support parents and caregivers in engaging their children in activities?
 - How can teachers emphasize play-based learning that is non-screen based?
 - How can the school district provide parents and caregivers with tangible items for carrying out learning activities in the home?
 - How can the activities be structured to attend to linguistic and cultural diversity?

Preliminary Recommendation #2

Ideas for Practice and Potential Areas of Investment Cont'd



- As part of teacher professional development, provide teacher planning time to coordinate the following:
 - Develop a family needs assessment, as discussed above, to understand what resources families need to support learning (e.g. books, arts and crafts, etc.).
 - Create a plan for distributing resources to families.
 - Encourage teachers to create lesson plans based on the materials.
 - Teachers can also motivate parents and caregivers to use the materials to supplement learning at home.
 - Seek support of local foundations, business, or community- based organizations to donate to the development of the kits.
 - Have staff create videos unpacking kits/bag and demonstrating how to use materials.
 - Include items and books in the kit that celebrate family language and cultural backgrounds.
- Provide professional development to inform teachers on how to promote the importance of relationship development with relatives, friends, and families who cannot be seen on a regular basis.
- [Provide professional development](#) time and support to teachers to co-create and conduct formative assessments to ascertain the various levels of student learning.
 - Provide trainings for teachers on how to implement observational assessment during remote learning (e.g. [potential resource](#)).
 - Create plans to observe development in both the home language and English language.
- Provide professional development on trauma-informed training opportunities and tools sensitive to ELs and their families:
 - Consult outside experts trained in childhood trauma and research on Adverse Childhood Experiences to provide staff with strategic support.
 - Invest in additional mental health professional development and training for school counselors and social workers. When possible, seek bilingual professionals.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Districts must prioritize family engagement and communication efforts—both virtually and in-person—that is responsive to the unique needs of linguistically and culturally diverse communities. Even before the pandemic, inequities existed in the amount of information available to non-English speaking parents and caregivers. Districts that were proactive in engaging parents and caregivers of ELs oftentimes relied on face-to-face meetings or gatherings. These parents tend to have unique work schedules, language barriers, and limited access to broadband/internet and technology. Now that in-person meetings are discouraged, districts must be innovative in determining ways to provide parents and caregivers access to critical information in a timely and safe manner.

Ideas for Practice and Potential Areas of Investment

- Create authentic opportunities to survey families about what is and is not working in this new learning environment. Educators should be encouraged to use multiple types of communication with EL families, as their needs often vary.
 - Create a sustainable feedback loop where school personnel have regular contact with families. Always convey the purpose for your contact. Parents and caregivers need to know why you are calling/contacting them.
 - Consider the development of family-focused surveys that are short (no more than 3 to 5 questions).
 - Keep survey focused on a singular topic.
 - When asking open-ended questions, interview the parents/caregivers and transcribe their feedback.
 - Phone calls are optimal for connecting with parents/caregivers, especially those with non-traditional work hours.
 - Many immigrant families are familiar with Facebook and surveys can be posted through this platform.
 - WhatsApp works well with immigrant families. Questions can be voice-recorded and sent to families.
- Post only one question at a time.
- Determine the security of this information and share this with families.
 - Cell phone surveys with one question are also effective.
 - If using a mailed survey, develop a multi-step strategy.
- Call the parents/caregivers to notify them the survey is coming in the mail.
- Mail a letter with the survey within one week.
- Send a postcard within one week as a reminder.

Ideas for Practice and Potential Areas of Investment Cont'd

- Ensure equitable sharing of critical information in multiple languages and in various modes of communication.
 - Use trusted community partners when dealing with immigrant families.
 - Provide bilingual staff or translation/interpretation services that will aide with communications with families.
 - Provide evening and weekend opportunities for parents and caregivers to connect to a live person virtually or within the school.
 - Consider how support staff might be able to help students with remote learning activities and also act as a resource when communicating with families. Multilingual families prefer communication via text or phone.
- High school students earning service credit could man a hotline to support younger students.
- Multilingual retirees could also work part-time to support connecting with families.
 - Designate a liaison with whom each family can communicate over the phone, preferably bilingual and culturally sensitive.
 - Prioritize meeting families' essential needs over instructional activities. Encourage staff to use multiple communication tools and formats to contact families to inquire about essential needs before asking them to engage in instructional activities (e.g., form, phone call, home visit, "office hours").
 - Provide tutorials for parents and caregivers about digital learning in multiple languages.

- Develop a communication campaign that provides positive messages to parents in various languages.
- Promote: parents/caregivers are the child's first and most important teacher. Parents/caregivers should be encouraged to always use their strongest language with their children, even if that language is not English
- Provide families with children over 18 months with IPADS
- Remind families that their native language practices in the home are rich and worthy.
- Have families submit pictures or videos of completed activities. Use these pictures/videos to showcase and feature the families on a regular basis.
- Create celebrations to encourage increased participation and mitigate social isolation.
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RECOMMENDATION 4: Develop and implement short- and long-term technology plans to promote equitable on-line learning opportunities for low-income immigrant communities.

Ideas for Practice and Potential Areas of Investment

- Establish a long-term vision for technological access.
 - Districts should conduct a needs assessment regarding digital access, with specific attention to vulnerable populations.
 - Develop long-term plans to address accessibility to broadband.
- Provide students and families with access to [Wi-Fi hot spots](#) (e.g. using buses as mobile hotspots or providing families with downloadable material on flash drives.)
- Provide support for linguistically diverse families on when and how to use devices and learning platforms
 - Create student- and family-centered help desks to help troubleshoot concerns. This could be facilitated through a relationship with the local public library or local community organization.
 - Minimize the number of technology platforms that parents/caregivers have to navigate. How many platforms do each student and families have to access during the day?
 - Provide short, accessible recorded trainings that are available in many languages.
 - Parent/caregiver education topics to consider:
 - How do you sign on and maintain broadband connection?
 - How to use various types of devices (smart phone, chrome book, IPAD)
 - How to work with various technology platforms
 - Provide explanation of the expanded role of technology in their child's learning
 - Use technology platforms that build on oral language
 - Consider both the home language and English

Ideas for Practice and Potential Areas of Investment Cont'd

- School districts should leverage the expertise of English Learner educators to select optimal tools to use and products that are specifically designed to build both language and academic content learning for ELs.
- Examples include:
 - Free educational videos can help ELs understand complicated concepts using interactive visuals.
 - E-readers allow ELs to pause and look up unfamiliar words while reading.
 - Project collaboration tools and discussion boards challenge older ELs to work with peers on projects in ways that strengthen their communication and collaboration skills
 - Presentation and publication tools help ELs demonstrate what they have learned through a combination of text, music, images, and video.
- Prioritize the use of media platforms to meet the socio-emotional needs of students. Ideas include the creation of a zoom parade to make up for lack of contact; zoom meetings with classes were critical social time for students.
 - Foster opportunities for students to meet virtually
 - Pair ELs of the same language background for authentic conversations.
- Promote technology as a basic need. It should be viewed like any other utility (affordable, accessible, regulated, etc.).

For Further Information,
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