

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS



## La Prensa Libre de Simpson Street

Monona, WI

**300** Average number of students served during the school year

**80%** ELL students

**70%** Students from low-income families

### Main funding sources:

- ▶ Local government
- ▶ Business
- ▶ Foundations
- ▶ Donations

## Supporting English language learners by offering literacy-related activities that motivate and interest students.

More than 4 million English language learners (ELL)—students who receive language assistance, such as bilingual education and High Intensity Language Training—attend public schools nationwide. This growing and diverse population faces myriad challenges and needs a coordinated system of support to help them build literacy skills and thrive. Afterschool programs are uniquely positioned to serve both ELL students and their families.

### Overview

*La Prensa Libre de Simpson Street* offers literacy programming that appeals to students, incorporating their interests into activities and promoting students' voices and choices into programming. The program operates as a student-run newspaper, where students determine which topics to investigate, work together to develop articles, and review and revise article drafts. This project-based approach helps students develop their literacy skills.

### A typical day for students

There is no typical day for La Prensa students. The newsroom opens and students begin filtering in at 3 p.m. Students have "jobs"—and their own business cards. They work as a team to publish the paper, which includes conducting article research, collaborating on outlines, and meeting with editors. Summer programming includes writing workshops and internship opportunities.

### Outcomes

Among SSFP students overall, approximately 80 percent of participants showed improved school attendance within one semester. Among new La Prensa students, 90 percent demonstrated improved reading comprehension within two semesters.

## Challenges

**ELL students face many hurdles in school.** ELL students must develop fluency in a new language, understand new content through a language they have limited proficiency in, and navigate a new school with an unfamiliar culture. ELL students are also more likely to live in low-income families and attend under-resourced schools.

**ELL students are struggling academically.** ELL students are between 2.5 and 3.5 times more likely to score below basic in reading than their English-fluent peers. The dropout rate for students who “spoke a language other than English at home and spoke English less than very well” is more than 3.5 times as high as the national average and ELL students’ graduation rate is almost 20 percentage points lower than the national average.

**ELL students are a growing and diverse population.** During the 2013-14 school year, approximately 4.5 million ELL students attended public school, an increase of almost a quarter of a million students over the past decade. ELL students comprise a diverse group of more than a dozen racial and ethnic populations speaking more than 30 languages.

Read [Afterschool Providing Key Literacy Supports to English Language Learner Students](#) to learn more.



## Program characteristics

La Prensa builds students’ literacy skills by giving students the freedom to explore their interests. This helps to foster curiosity in the writing process and spark a love of literacy. A foundational point of the program is that students see the paper as their own. It is a student-run newsroom, where students manage their own assignments and collaborate to produce a final publication. La Prensa students develop pride in the work published, knowing that their byline represents the hard work put into each article.

Each assignment starts with carefully selected source material on a topic of interest in Spanish or English, running the gamut from the effects of eating too much sugar to how teens can save money. Students outline and fact-check their work, meet one-on-one with an editor, and then draft the article. Articles go through many rounds of revisions before they are ready for publication and students continuously meet with editors to understand how they can further develop their work. Students also take on more responsibilities as their skills grow.

La Prensa treats bilingualism as an advantage, encouraging students to write in English and Spanish and develop their writing and editing skills in their native and second languages to support literacy gains.

## Program history

In response to the high number of ELL students in local schools, Simpson Street Free Press (SSFP), University of Wisconsin Madison, Edgewood College, and local libraries collaborated to open La Prensa as a new program and publication in 2013. SSFP is uniquely positioned to support ELL students based on the program model, as well as their belief that students’ bilingualism is an advantage to their literacy growth. La Prensa’s success led to the creation of the Sennett Free Press, a second bilingual newspaper by SSFP students.

## Recommendations

*for promoting ELL students’ interest and engagement in literacy*

- ▶ A leadership pipeline for students can boost engagement as a motivational tool for younger students and a draw for older youth.
- ▶ Give students opportunities to highlight their work publicly. Students take pride when they see their work published.



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