



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234

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To: New York State Even Start Family Literacy Partnerships

From: DeSylvia W. Dwyer 

Subject: Basic Education in the Native Language Instruction

Questions have been raised concerning the use of federal Even Start Family Literacy funds to support Basic Education in the Native Language (BENL) instruction. The United States Department of Education indicated that Even Start Family Literacy statute does not prohibit the use of funds for BENL instruction, however, it emphasizes that one of the primary purposes of Even Start Family Literacy is helping adults reach English language proficiency.

The United States Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education indicated that using the federal Workforce Investment Act, Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act to support BENL instruction is a decision reserved for each state.

In New York State, BENL is viewed as a tool that may be used at the very beginning of English language literacy instruction to enable students to ultimately read and write English. As such, federal and state adult education funds may be used to support BENL instruction that supplements English language instruction or used to support the transition from ELL to adult basic/literacy education. Federal and state adult education funds may not be used to support stand-alone BENL instruction. Please note that learner growth, however, is measured using the BEST Plus, an oral English language proficiency assessment.

Prior to initiating BENL instruction, partnerships should consider its potential impact on learners and on programming.

Please feel free to contact me at (518) 474-5807 if you have any questions or need additional information.