

# Supporting English Learners

When a student who is learning English enrolls in your school/district, it can be hard to know where to start. You may have questions about how to communicate with the student and their family, about how to teach English as a Second Language, or about what rights the student has and what responsibilities the school/district has.

1.

## Who are English Learners?

English learners (ELs) are students whose proficiency in speaking, reading, writing, and understanding English may hamper their ability to successfully achieve in an English-speaking classroom. These students have been identified following the procedures of [Ill. Admin. Code 228](#). English learners and their families come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds with a multitude of life and educational experiences. The majority of students who are identified as ELs are born in the United States. Newcomer ELs are a distinct group.

## Who are Newcomers?

"Newcomer" is a term for students born outside of the United States and their families, who have recently arrived in the United States. These students and families may fall into a variety of categories. Learning more about student and family backgrounds helps guide districts/schools to provide more specific services. Newcomers *may* be:

- Students with adequate, regular formal education
- Students with limited or interrupted inconsistent formal education
- Students who speak some English
- Students who come from English-speaking countries or who, upon screening, may be determined as English proficient
- English learners
- Refugees
- Asylum seekers
- Unaccompanied youth
- Unhoused



Did you know that every district in the state has an [assigned principal consultant](#) from the ISBE Multilingual/Language Development Department? Please reach out to your principal consultant or email [multilingual@isbe.net](mailto:multilingual@isbe.net) to receive individualized assistance.



## Welcoming ELs & Building Relationships

It is well known that relationships are the key to a successful school experience for everyone involved, no matter their linguistic background. Once you know more about your new students' backgrounds, you can make informed choices about helping EL students, EL newcomers, and their families feel more welcome in your community. Please reference our [Communicating in Parents Native Language FAQ](#) for more information about district responsibilities to provide interpretation and translation services. Some other ideas for welcoming EL newcomers and their families include:

- Give them a tour of the building with a map containing visual cues:
  - Introduce them to key people to know in the building (for the student and family).
  - Print out staff names with titles and photos, highlighting specific people to know;
  - Point out where resources are in person and on a map – counselor's office, restrooms, library, lost and found, vending machines, cafeteria, nurse, etc.
- Connect with current students and families who are welcoming and willing to help.
- Specifically invite the student to participate in clubs and attend sporting events or extracurricular activities.
- Extend specific, translated invitations to events such as back-to-school night/open house, conferences, or PTA meetings rather than assuming they will see it on Facebook or in an email.
- Be sure they know where important local places are as well – the community park, the public library, etc.



## Second Language Acquisition

This is a brief overview of typical English language development. Second language acquisition is a long-term process. While most students will gain full social language proficiency in six months to two years, full academic proficiency may take five to seven years or more. Become familiar with the stages and encourage your staff to do so as well, so as not to expect too much or too little from ELs. Also, keep in mind that social language and academic language are different. Students may seem to “know English” but will still require resources to participate on an academic level with their peers.

### Entering | Pre-production

- Silent period.
- Students are taking in the language but not producing yet.
- Don't force engagement.
- Focus on reading and listening.
- Non-verbal comprehension checks, native language support.

### Beginning | Early production

- Student may use words and phrases in predictable situations, familiar context.
- Student continues to take in and comprehend more English.
- Can answer questions with 1-2 familiar words or yes/no, either/or.

### Developing | Speech emergent

- Student has good comprehension.
- Student uses simple sentences, may not be able to produce language at the same level they comprehend it.
- Student can use technical and content-specific words with support.
- Grammar errors.

### Expanding/Bridging | Intermediate fluency

- The student can comprehend well and express comprehension.
- Can use technical and content-specific words.
- Fewer grammar errors.

### Bridging/Reaching | Advanced fluency

- Student has native-level understanding and production.
- May make grammar errors that other grade-level peers make.
- Has “exited” their EL status.
- On track academically with grade-level peers.



Please refer to the WIDA [Can Do Descriptors](#) for more specific language development information broken down by grade level.

## Identification + Screening, Placement, Assessment

1. Administer Home Language Survey that determines:

a.

If a language other than English is spoken in the student's home and, if so, which language; and

b.

If the student speaks a language other than English and, if so, which language.

*Note: Marking YES on the Home Language Survey indicates that a child has the presence of a language other than English in their background, not mean that they are an "English learner" officially. The child next must be SCREENED for EL identification:*

2. Screening shall take place within 30 days after the student's enrollment in the district. Refer to [III. Admin. Code 228](#) or email your principal consultant to learn about potential exceptions or find the answers to questions about a specific student.

### Q: "OK, SO HOW DO I GO ABOUT ADMINISTERING A SCREENER?"

1.

Visit the ISBE [Multilingual Identification webpage](#) to learn more.

2.

Send an email to [multilingual@isbe.net](mailto:multilingual@isbe.net) asking to be connected with the principal consultant who specializes in [WIDA](#) assessments and accounts.

*Per [Section 228.20](#), all identification information should be entered into the Student Information System – the student's language background, results of the screener, and if the student is then identified as an English learner or not.*

3. If a student's score on the screener identifies them as an EL, you must inform their parents/guardians. If they are identified as English proficient, it is best practice to inform their parents/guardians.



You can find examples of Home Language Surveys to use and resources for accessing and administering the screener on the ISBE [Multilingual Identification webpage](#). Find sample letters home to parents regarding screeners and placement in EL programs on the ISBE [Multilingual Placement webpage](#).

## Compliance

The following laws, codes, and landmark federal cases provide the framework for the requirements for educating English Learners in Illinois.

GUIDING DOCUMENTS: ILLINOIS	
<a href="#">105 ILCS 5/Art. 14C</a>	
<a href="#">Ill. Admin. Code 228</a>	
GUIDING DOCUMENTS: FEDERAL	
<p><a href="#">Title VI, Civil Rights Act of 1964</a></p> <p>Prohibits denial of equal access to education because of language minority students' limited proficiency in English.</p> <p>Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1968: The Bilingual Education Act: The first Federal Legislation to recognize the unique needs of English language learners and the need for specialized instruction. It established federal funding for the training of bilingual teachers and bilingual programs. Equal Educational Opportunity Act of 1974: Defines denial of equal educational opportunity as "failure by an educational agency to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by students in an instructional program."</p>	
<p><a href="#">Lau v. Nichols</a></p> <p>414 U.S. 563 (U.S. Supreme Court, 1974): Districts must take affirmative steps to overcome educational barriers faced by the non-English speaking students in the district.</p>	
<p><a href="#">Castañeda v. Pickard</a></p> <p>(648 F.2d 989, U.S. Court of Appeals, 5th Circuit, 1981 ): Programs for ELs should be based on a sound educational theory; reasonably calculated to implement effectively the educational theory adopted by the school, with adequate resources and personnel; and evaluated as effective in overcoming language barriers after a trial period.</p>	
<p><a href="#">Plyler v. Doe</a></p> <p>457 U.S. 202, 102 S. Ct. 2382, 72 L. Ed. 2d 786 (1982): The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that undocumented children have the same right as U.S. citizens and permanent residents to receive a free public education.</p>	
<p><a href="#">Dear Colleague Letter</a></p> <p>January 7, 2015, from the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division and U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights: This joint guidance is to assist State Education Agencies, school districts, and all public schools in meeting their legal obligations to ensure that EL students can participate meaningfully and equally in educational programs and services.</p>	