

Placement

All public and charter schools supporting ELs must provide a Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP) and meaningful access to the core curriculum. There are two competing theories about how to support students: with other English learners or with their native English-speaking peers (Umansky et al, 2018). In general education courses, an EL's needs may not be addressed due to scarce EL teaching expertise. *Placing ELs in age-appropriate general education classrooms is a positive step toward meeting the "meaningful access to core curriculum" Office of Civil Rights (OCR) mandate; however, all teachers with ELs in their class must be sufficiently prepared to adapt curriculum, instruction and assessments by participating in either DESE-sponsored training or certification or through district-designed professional development targeting English learners* (EL Toolkit, 2015).

On the other hand, separating ELs from the general education program to focus on English language development is another popular approach. Although spending time acculturating students to US schools and focusing on English language proficiency can be beneficial, this strategy limits interaction with mainstream peers and access to core credit bearing classes needed for graduation. *If the district decides to temporarily segregate ELs for these reasons, all academic deficits must be remedied within a reasonable amount of time* (EL Toolkit, 2015). Additionally, such programs must have documented goals, including time in program and how progress will be assessed. This issue is particularly tense when the discussion centers around ELs with specific characteristics such as age, lack of formal education or those dealing with trauma.

Generally, students should be placed at the age-appropriate grade level. *They must not be placed in a grade behind simply because of the results from the English language proficiency screener or a perceived lack of proficiency in English or academics.* Some flexibility can and should be applied to this rule according to circumstances. The following are situations that merit consideration:

- The student is within two months in age of students in a lower grade.
- The student is determined to be developmentally delayed or has a severely deprived background (as may be the case with children adopted from overseas orphanages)
- The student arrives during the school year and has limited or interrupted formal education

Exceptions should be limited and each one carefully considered. Students should never be more than one year behind their age-appropriate grade. It is important to note that most ELLs are able to access the content if the lessons, activities and assessments are accessible and catch up "at break-neck speed" (Mace-Matluck, Alexander-Kasparik & Queen, 1998)

Other students, some of which have not attended school for years, may require the district to offer alternative, remedial courses. Although it is important for the school to follow state and local guidelines and standards, the classes taken by students of the same age are simply unrealistic. For example, a 15-year-old student who lacks basic math and numeracy skills will have little chance of success in an Algebra course taken by other students of the same age. Careful attention must be paid to these situations. *The district must be able to determine if the student's lack of content knowledge is due to inadequate prior schooling or language proficiency.* Many times, this information can only be obtained through assessments in the native language. If the source is language proficiency, the student must be placed in the grade-level appropriate class. If the source is inadequate prior schooling, a remedial course will be more appropriate. Remedial courses, even those taken in high school, can be credited as a core credit. That decision is made through local policy.

Importantly, ELs are entitled to any program for which they qualify. If a student is enrolled in a Special Education, Title I Reading or Gifted program, for example, those teachers must also take affirmative steps to support the student despite their English language proficiency level. **One program does not supersede another;** ELs are entitled to any program for which they qualify.