

English Learners



A Guide for Low-Incidence Districts



THE SUDDEN ARRIVAL OF STUDENTS SPEAKING languages other than English can be challenging to nonexperienced school district personnel who are expected to serve them. This document provides novice school districts with practical knowledge of the first steps to overcoming the anxiety of hosting new students who are English Learners (ELs). References on issues addressed here can be found in the “Educating Linguistically Diverse Students” handbook located at <https://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/cur-eld-educating-linguistically-diverse-students.pdf>.

Why must a district identify ELs?

All school districts in Missouri are required to implement a plan designed to systematically identify students who speak languages other than English at home. The plan should include procedures for assessing the language ability of these students in the areas of reading, writing, speaking and listening. The district should designate a plan implementer (the ESOL coordinator). School personnel enrolling ELs should be educated in the process of identifying, assessing and providing services to these students.

Such requirements apply to all school districts including those that do not currently serve ELs. Districts with a low number of ELs may contract with a neighboring district for services until a qualified EL teacher is in place.

How can a district and the families of ELs share information about their cultures and communities?

The United States is experiencing a period of growth in linguistic and cultural diversity throughout its high-quality educational system. Families with students from non-English backgrounds are resourceful in providing information about their children. School personnel are encouraged to interact with new families to gather information about the linguistic, social and cultural resources of the new students and their communities of origin. Personnel must avoid asking questions related to immigration status and Social Security numbers. During school and family conversations, questions may include language-use practices, students’ life at home, parents’

expectations, parents' knowledge about schooling, parents' areas of expertise, etc.

School personnel may share information related to the American educational system, expectations, opportunities, and available resources at school and in the host community. All questions to new families must be strictly oriented to identifying their needs. Appropriate services must follow.

How can a district get new families of ELs involved in school activities?

The families of ELs bring a wealth of linguistic and sociocultural experiences to the school and community. One of the best ways to benefit from this rich variety of expertise is to invite parents to general meetings, open houses or workshops where they can comfortably share their views and knowledge with the school population. These parents might not be fluent in English or able to make formal presentations, but their familiarization with school personnel and activities could encourage them to share their theories, views and experiences in one-on-one situations during social interactions.

How can a district increase the involvement of these families in school activities?

Poverty, multiple job commitments, cultural backgrounds and many other factors could prevent the parents of ELs from attending school meetings, conferences, open houses and other activities. School administrators must adapt their schedules to allow choices. Schools are advised to inform the parents of ELs as soon as activities are planned; this allows parents to be able to make arrangements at work.

What if a district does not have an ESOL teacher?

The state of Missouri requires that all school districts be prepared to test ELs for their language abilities and for service purposes. One way to overcome this challenge is to view the English Learner (EL) Data from the Department website. Administrators can locate a nearby school district with an EL population and make arrangements to borrow or to speak to an experienced ESOL teacher for testing or advice. When fewer than 20 ELs are present, some tutoring sessions could be provided by a regular teacher, a foreign-language teacher or an aide (under the supervision of a certified teacher) while a district is preparing to have a teacher attend ESOL-related training. School personnel can contact the Department for information regarding upcoming ESOL-related training workshops, conferences and meetings.

Title I services are not enough to help English learners. There must be some modification or adaptation of the curriculum geared toward accessibility and English learning.

The state of Missouri requires that all school districts serving 20 or more EL students hire a full-time, certified or ESOL-endorsed teacher.

What paperwork may a school district request from ELs or parents?

A school is required to have documentation that a child has been immunized or is exempt from immunization because of religious beliefs or because of a medical contraindication determined by a physician. A school may also ask for proof of residency within the district, transcripts and information verifying the student's age. Birth certificates, hospital records or affidavits are examples of documents that may be used to verify age.

Under no circumstances should a student be denied enrollment because the student or parents cannot provide or refuse to provide a birth certificate. The same is true for Social Security numbers. A student cannot be denied admission to school or participation in a program based on the student's undocumented status. A student's undocumented status refers to the inability to provide a Social Security number, green card, visa or other documentation indicating legal residency in the United States of America. Any such discrimination would be a denial of the equal protection of the law in violation of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

What does equal educational opportunity mean?

Equal educational opportunity means that all Missouri school children – regardless of national origin, race, color, age, sex or disability – should be able to receive a quality education in a welcoming school environment that gives them the opportunity to obtain the knowledge and the skills they need to be successful in life. EL students must not be left behind.

Should only English be taught to ELs?

Whenever the resources are present, school districts are encouraged to emphasize both English and the native language and to promote multicultural understanding.

Are special education services appropriate for ELs?

School personnel must avoid inappropriate referrals of ELs to special education. Detailed steps on how to go about this issue are found in the "Educating Linguistically Diverse Students" handbook.

Where can I find technical and financial assistance?

The best place to start is the MELL website at <https://dese.mo.gov/quality-schools/migrant-el-immigrant-refugee-education/english-learners>. Look for the PDF document titled “Educating Linguistically Diverse Students.” You may also contact the Department at 573-526-3232 for guidance.

Funding from the state of Missouri will be made available through money provided by Title III of the Every Student Succeeds Act. Contact the Grants & Resources section of the Department for information. The U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and others offer additional funding opportunities.

The Office of English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement and Academic Achievement for English Learner Students (within USDE) provides updates on grant competitions. Visit <https://www.ed.gov/>

TO ASSIST SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN OVERCOMING educational barriers, a list of resources is available in the “Educating Linguistically Diverse Students” handbook found on the MELL website. All school districts must adopt a plan to identify, assess and serve English learners. Districts must have an assessment instrument in place to test ELs. Refer to the WIDA link at <https://wida.wisc.edu/>.



Helping EL students manage:

*New Schools
New Languages
New Cultures
New Challenges
New Skills*



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