Frequently Asked Questions

About Identification of English Learners

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At the English Learner Administrator Network meeting on November 14, 2018, consultants from the Lau Resource Center at the Ohio Department of Education clarified issues around identification of English learners. The questions and answers below reflect the discussion at the meeting.

Click here for ODE's guidance on identification of English learners.

How is a student identified as an English Learner?

Ohio has a two-step process to identify students who are English learners. The first step is the Language Usage Survey. Parents of all students enrolling in public school districts or community schools complete a Language Usage Survey (LUS) as part of the enrollment process. The LUS is available in English and ten other languages (click here). If the student hears and interacts in languages other than English, the student should be screened for their English language skills. The second step is the screener. The online Ohio English Language Proficiency Screener, OELPS, is administered individually. Students receive a score in four domains – listening, speaking, reading and writing. The scores range from 1 – 5, with 1 indicating beginner and 5 indicating advanced proficiency. Students are designated as "Emerging, Progressing or Proficient" overall. Students whose scores correspond with age and grade-level peers scoring as "proficient" do not qualify for classification as English Learners. Students whose scores correlate with "emerging" or "progressing" levels are identified as English learners.

All students in Kindergarten who are identified as potential English learners on the LUS should be given the OELPS. All students newly arrived in the USA will also be given the OELPS. For students transferring from another school in Ohio, or from another state, see below.

Occasionally parents answer "English" to the home language questions on the Language Usage Survey, LUS, but it becomes obvious that the child isn't proficient in English. Should I assess the student with OELPS?

It is important to build trust and to respect the parents' decision. Ensure that the parents understand the questions.   If you think the child is not proficient, take time to observe him or her in the first thirty days. Share your observations with the parents. If the parents amend their LUS, you can screen the child. If the parents do not change the enrollment form, respect their decision and do not screen the child.

Is it necessary to ask parent permission to give the OELPS?

This is a local decision. It is not necessary, but a district may choose to do so.

Can parents refuse to have their child screened?

Parents can refuse. However, the school staff should ensure that the parents understand the consequences of their decision, and why the screening may benefit their child.

If a student transfers from one school district in Ohio to another, is it necessary to administer the OELPS if the LUS has a language other than English?

Check the student's records for evidence that he or she has been screened for EL services, has been identified as an EL, or has exited from an EL program. If a student is already identified in Ohio, he or she continues to be an English learner. Send home a letter informing the parents of continuation of services.

If it is proving difficult to obtain school records in a timely manner, check the Online Reporting System in the Testing Portal. Look at "Students currently my students" and you may find the results of OELPS and/or OELPA there. Another option is to call the Help Desk at 877-231-7809. A further resource is to ask your EMIS coordinator to check ODDEX. Remember that if you call or email the staff of ODE regarding a student, use only the SSID number, never use the student's name.

If a student transfers from another state to Ohio, is it necessary to administer the OELPS if the LUS has a language other than English?

Check the student's school records for evidence that he or she has been screened for EL services, has been identified as an EL, or has exited from an EL program. Regardless of whether the other state is affiliated with ELPA or WIDA or has its own standards, Ohio will accept the results. Send home a letter informing the parents of continuation of services, or that the records were examined and that there is no need for EL services.

Will there be any more training on how to administer the OELPS?

The Office of Assessment plans to update the PowerPoint as needed, and is looking into making short videos on different parts of the screener. Paula Mahaley is also available to Skype with school staff around Ohio.

If a student qualifies for English services on the OELPS, does that necessarily mean that he or she should be designated as an English Learner? Is there any teacher discretion in classifying students as ELs?

If a student qualifies, he or she is designated as an EL. There is no teacher discretion.

What are the EMIS codes for English learners?

L – First year in U.S. schools

S – Second year in U.S. schools

Y – Third or more years in U.S. schools. Y = Yes, the student is an English Learner

M – Trial Mainstream – a designation given to students who score 4s and 5s and one 3 on the OELPA. Trial Mainstream is only based on OELPA scores, not on OELPS. The designation only applies for one year. If, for example, a student is trial mainstream one year, but the next year scores 5, 4, 3, 3, he or she is no longer Trial Mainstream. Being Trial Mainstream doesn't dictate how a school district serves a student.

Is the Parent Notification Letter available in languages other than English?

Schools must notify parents of the child's identification as an English Learner. Parents should be notified within 30 days of the beginning of the school year, or within 14 days if the child is enrolled during the school year. Currently, the letter is available in English and Spanish. Districts can translate documents into other languages.

Find more resources like this in our English Learner Resource Hub on our webpage.