

Frequently Asked Questions

Providing Language Assistance to English Learners

What legal obligations do districts have to English Learners (ELs)?

Schools must:

- Identify English learners (see the [FAQ on Identification](#))
- Provide language assistance based on best practices
- Provide staff and resources for the EL program
- Provide meaningful access to all curricular and extracurricular programs
- Avoid segregation of ELs
- Provide services to ELs with disabilities and provide dual services
- Meet the needs of students who opt out of the EL program
- Monitor and exit ELs
- Evaluate and modify EL programs
- Ensure meaningful communication with parents of ELs

Do parents need to give permission for their child to receive EL services?

Yes, they do. When a child is identified as an EL, a notification is sent home to the parents with the child's scores and an explanation of the program. Parents sign the letter stating that they understand and give their consent. Keep a copy of this signed form in the student's school records. For more information, see the U.S. Department of Education's [Family Toolkit](#).

What kind of English Language Development program is required?

The law does not specify a certain program. Schools and districts are required to have a program that is educationally sound in theory and effective in practice. School districts should choose a program that best meets their students' needs. Programs may include pull out lessons, push in, co-teaching, newcomer programs, bilingual programs, and sheltered instruction. School districts with very low numbers of ELs must still provide language assistance, but it may be an informal program.

Is there a curriculum or textbook series that is recommended for ELs?

Teachers should use the [English Language Proficiency standards](#) to guide instruction. There is no curriculum or textbook series required. Districts can choose a commercial textbook series if they wish, ensuring that it meets the needs of their ELs.

Who can teach in an English Language Development program?

Highly qualified teachers are required to provide an effective program. In Ohio EL teachers must have a TESOL license, a TESOL endorsement or be actively working on obtaining an endorsement. In addition, schools must ensure that the EL teachers are fluent in the English language. Many districts also provide bilingual aides and paraprofessionals who must have a permit and should be proficient in English as well as in the other language, if hired as a bilingual aide. Ongoing professional learning opportunities should be provided to EL teachers and support staff.



How can districts ensure that their EL program is effective?

Districts must ensure that the EL program has highly qualified staff, adequate space, and sufficient resources. Every second year, in the odd year, districts are required to evaluate their EL programs in a self-survey, and some districts are audited through a desk review or on-site review. However, it is good practice to evaluate an EL program every year. During this evaluation, a team updates the manual and documents, reviews policies and procedures, reviews EL teacher schedules, analyzes OELPA results, EL's results from state tests, analyzes participation rates in curricular and extracurricular programs, and evaluates the family engagement plan. Based on this evaluation, the team makes changes for the following school year, and for the use of Title III funding. An important way to ensure a high quality program is to train all teachers to work effectively with ELs.

What can mainstream and content area teachers do to assist ELs?

For most ELs, the majority of the school day is spent with general education teachers. Schools must provide training to their general education teachers on best practices for ELs. The progress of ELs is now part of the Gap Closing measure on the school report card if districts have sufficient numbers of ELs. Districts and teachers will want to provide the best possible services to ELs to help them access the general curriculum. General education teachers would ideally have training in language acquisition, an awareness of the English Language Proficiency Standards, and knowledge of accommodations and modifications that assist ELs as they learn both English and the content. All teachers are language teachers. The EL teacher(s) are a resource in the district to provide PD to general education teachers. In districts with large EL populations, many general education teachers are trained in SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol), a sheltered instruction method.

Can ELs also receive other services?

Yes, the law is clear. ELs are eligible for all other programs for which they qualify. An EL may also receive reading services, be in Special Education, in gifted classes, AP classes, career and tech classes and so on. ELs should never be denied access to other programs because of their English proficiency. Districts need to ensure that ELs and their families know about curricular and extracurricular activities.

How many EL students should be assigned to one EL teacher?

There is no law on this topic in Ohio. Unlike Special Education, there are no operating standards for teaching ELs. It is a local decision. However, districts must keep in mind the legal requirement to provide an effective EL program. Analyzing the data will help a district assess if they are providing effective services. Some districts might want to reach out to similar districts to compare EL program components.



If a parent refuses EL services, what should a school do?

First, explain to the parents the consequences of their choice. If parents still refuse services, the district must respect their decision. The student is still classified as an EL, still receives allowable accommodations on state tests and still takes the OELPA. The district is responsible to ensure that the student acquires English so should train general education teachers in best practices for ELs. The district needs to offer the EL program to the parents each year until the child exits on the OELPA. Document the parents' decision each year.

Do districts need to provide services to ELs in preschools?

If a district houses a preschool, the children's enrollment form will include the Language Usage Survey. The survey will indicate which children are potentially ELs. Districts may choose to screen these children using a commercial screener, but are not required to do so. OELPS cannot be used until a child enters Kindergarten. The district may offer support to the preschool program, invite the preschool teachers to attend PD, and provide assistance.

Do districts need to provide services to ELs in non-public schools?

Districts should consult with non-public schools in their geographical area in the spring in order to determine the needs of the ELs and their teachers. Decisions are made as to types of services, who will identify students and who provides what service. Any districts receiving Title III funds must give equitable services and funds to ELs in non-public schools. Districts may assist with identification and assessment of ELs, offer professional learning and give support.

Is it necessary to have an individual EL plan for each student?

An individual plan, similar to an IEP, is not required in Ohio. However, EL plans are good practice and ensure that all teachers of an EL are aware of the student's proficiency level, literacy level, needs, accommodations and parents' language proficiency. Generally, the EL teacher writes the plan and distributes it to all teachers who work with that student.

Should students who are coded as Trial Mainstream receive EL services?

This is a local decision. The trial mainstream, or "M" code in EMIS, is given to students who score fours and fives and one three on the OELPA. It is not an indication of what services should be provided. The EL teacher may choose to assist the student in the domain in which the three was received.

Can foreign exchange students receive EL services?

Most foreign exchange students arrive with sufficient English to access the curriculum. However, foreign exchange students are considered regular students. The school should give the OELPS (screener) if a language other than English is noted on the Language Usage Survey. If the student qualifies as an EL, he or she receives EL services, receives allowable accommodations on state tests and takes the OELPA. The school or district determines what the EL service will be. The student could receive assistance from the EL teacher, or the EL teacher might consult with the teachers.



How should newcomers be placed in high school?

ELs are required to be placed with their age peers. A newcomer arriving in high school is a transfer student. A high school should consider each student individually and make a placement decision based on transcripts. If transcripts are lacking, the school must make a decision based on the best interests of the student.

This FAQ was compiled by Jill Kramer, EL Coordinator at the ESC of Central Ohio. Contact Jill at jill.kramer@escoco.org for questions or further assistance.

For more information around EL education and program requirements in Ohio, visit ODE's [Lau Resource Center](#) online.

