



# Special Topics in English Learner Programming: Difference vs. Disability in English Learners

Nov. 14, 2019 | Anika Harris

# Welcome

OSSE welcomes you to *Special Topics in English Learner Programming!*

This month's webinar is **Difference vs. Disability in English Learners.**

**Your facilitator today is**

**Anika Harris**, professional development specialist, English language acquisition

# Objectives

This webinar is designed to help participants distinguish between language difference and disability in English learners (ELs). Delays in communication and socio-emotional development can occur among non-native English speaking students who are acquiring the English language as well as in ELs with disabilities.

In this month's webinar, participants will learn:

- Key questions to ask when distinguishing between language difference and a disability
- Types of developmentally appropriate behaviors that are attributed to language acquisition, yet commonly attributed to a disability
- Strategies to support ELs before initiating a special education referral

# Reflection

1. In your experience, what are some reasons an EL is considered for a special education referral?
2. In what grades are these ELs?
3. At what level of English language proficiency are these ELs?
4. Are any of these ELs newcomers, i.e., first year in a US school?
5. When deciding if a special education referral is needed, does your school/LEA consult with an EL teacher who has specialized training in second language acquisition and English as a Second Language instruction?



# Introduction

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# Foundational Principles for Serving ELs



Value the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of English learners (ELs).



Provide EL students access to grade-level academic content and English language instruction that are appropriate for advancing their language proficiency and academic achievement.



Partner with families, educators, system leaders, and communities to nurture EL students' linguistic, academic, social, and emotional development.



Use multiple sources of data to inform and continually refine EL programs, services, instruction and assessment.

# Who is a “child with a disability”?

Child with a disability means a child having:

mental retardation, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this part as "emotional disturbance"), an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, an other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.

- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 2004

# What is a “language disability”?

A language disability is defined as:

- A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.

A language disability does not include:

- Learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or ***of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.***

- IDEA, 2004, §300.8



# Prevalence of Disabilities in ELs

Language impairment in ELs occurs at the same rate as in native English speakers.

ELs do not have more difficulty learning language than their native English-speaking peers with a language impairment.

Families with limited English ability are less likely to have a child receive a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Low socioeconomic status is related to a lower likelihood of receiving a diagnosis for Autism Spectrum Disorder.

*Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures*, NASEM, 2017.  
<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/24677/promoting-the-educational-success-of-children-and-youth-learning-english>

# The Over- and Under-identification of ELs

- Autism spectrum disorder is under-identified and underdiagnosed among ELs.
- ELs are less likely to be referred to early intervention and early special education programs than non-ELs.
- Some regions identified ELs differently based on limited proficiency in either English only or their first language and English.
  - The latter were over-identified for speech/language impairment in elementary school.
  - This same group, in secondary school, was over-represented among ELs with intellectual disabilities, speech/language impairment, and specific learning disabilities.
- Elementary newcomers were over-represented in special education compared to secondary newcomers.

*Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures*, NASEM, 2017.  
<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/24677/promoting-the-educational-success-of-children-and-youth-learning-english>

# Evaluation and Special Education Eligibility

Per the IDEA 20 U.S. Code § 1414 (3)(A)(i), “assessments and other evaluation materials are selected and administered so as not to be discriminatory on a racial or cultural basis and (ii) are provided and administered in the language and form most likely to yield accurate information on what the child knows and can do academically, developmentally, and functionally, unless it is not feasible to so provide or administer.”

IDEA 20 U.S. Code § 1414(5)(c) provides that limited English proficiency **cannot** be the determinant factor in determining eligibility for special education services.

# Family Involvement and Evaluation

- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 provides that school districts draw from a variety of sources in the evaluation process to reduce the chance of errors.
- Presumptions and stereotypes are unacceptable factors in the evaluation process.
- Obtaining information from parents can lessen the chance of infusing misinformation in the evaluation process.
- Interpreters may be used to facilitate communication with parents, but lack of professional interpreting ability may lead to misidentification.

# Analyzing and Utilizing Evaluation Results

- Do evaluators know how to differentiate between a disability and language that is developing slowly due to a lack of language stimulation?
- Is the IEP team is comprised of both special educators and EL specialists and consulting with someone knowledgeable in possible cultural differences?
- Does a limited English proficient family needs accommodations to participate in the educational setting such as a sign language interpreter, braille, large print, or an interpreter from the same dialect/region/tribe?



# Comparing Behaviors

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# Similar Issues, Different Origins

Although ELs and students with disabilities (SWDs) are both at risk for lower achievement in language and literacy, the risk occurs for different reasons.

A SWD might have a language processing issue which impacts reading comprehension and literacy skill development.

An EL without a disability can usually learn to read in their native language, but may need more exposure to both spoken and written English to promote English literacy and reading comprehension.

Spear-Swerling, L. (February, 2006). *Learning Disabilities in English Language Learners*. Retrieved from [http://www.idonline.org/spearswerling/Learning\\_Disabilities\\_in\\_English\\_Language\\_Learners](http://www.idonline.org/spearswerling/Learning_Disabilities_in_English_Language_Learners)

# Similar Issues, Different Origins

To reduce the incidences of disproportionate EL representation in special education programs, educators should be familiar with shared characteristics between ELs and SWDs.

- Weak oral language skills
- Poor motivation
- Low self-esteem

When deciding if an EL should be evaluated for special education, consider:

***Is what I observe actually rooted in second language acquisition, acculturation, or the lack of prior opportunity to acquire academic knowledge and skills.***



# Behavior Comparison

Observable Behavior	Possible Language Learning Issue	Possible Special Education Issue
Adds or deletes words	May not yet know the word, may not have internalized the words or requires more practice	Memory or oral language processing difficulties
Is easily distracted	Does not understand; is overwhelmed with new information; requires more visual/concrete support	Has an auditory processing disorder or ADHD
Has trouble following directions	Does not know the vocabulary in the instructions	Has sequencing or memory difficulties

Adapted from: Else Hamayan, Barbara Marler, Cristina Sanchez-Lopez, and Jack Damico. Special Education Considerations for English Language Learners: Delivering a Continuum of Services. Caslon Publishing, 2007. p.40

# Behavior Comparison

Observable Behavior	Possible Language Learning Issue	Possible Special Education Issue
Avoids writing	Struggling with confidence; needs vocabulary; still learning what words go in what order; frustrated that his/her product is imperfect	Has fine motor difficulties and/or limited expressive language
Cannot retell a story in sequence or summarize a plot	Is unfamiliar with the context and/or vocabulary; struggling to make meaning of large amounts of information; comprehends more than can retell	Has difficulty organizing or processing information

Adapted from: Else Hamayan, Barbara Marler, Cristina Sanchez-Lopez, and Jack Damico. Special Education Considerations for English Language Learners: Delivering a Continuum of Services. Caslon Publishing, 2007. p.40

# Behavior Comparison

Observable Behavior	Possible Language Learning Issue	Possible Special Education Issue
Aggressive or withdrawn	Lack of experience in a formal education setting; trauma; differing cultural norms; experiencing “silent period”	Has anxiety, depression, self-regulation issues, or social communication issues
Computes math calculations, but cannot solve word problems	Does not know the vocabulary of the math problem, is not familiar with the currency, has no prior experience with the content	Has processing or abstract reasoning problems, a memory problem, or a sequencing issue; may not be able to generalize from previous examples

Adapted from: Else Hamayan, Barbara Marler, Cristina Sanchez-Lopez, and Jack Damico. Special Education Considerations for English Language Learners: Delivering a Continuum of Services. Caslon Publishing, 2007. p.40



## Key Questions to Distinguish Difference from Disability

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# What Do We Do With Sunny?

Seung Mi “Sunny” Chang arrived at your school two weeks ago from Korea where she attended the International School of Busan beginning at age 2. She is now 8 and has been placed in third grade.



[www.bifskorea.org](http://www.bifskorea.org)



# What Do We Do With Sunny?



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# What Do We Do With Sunny?



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# What Do We Do With Sunny?

Seung Mi “Sunny” Chang arrived at your school two weeks ago from Korea where she attended the International School of Pusan beginning at age 2. She is now 8 and has been placed in third grade. Her WIDA Screener results were 2-Speaking, 5-Listening, 4-Reading, and 4-Writing.

Sunny’s parents moved to DC for work at the International Monetary Fund. They speak English on the job, but use Korean at home, where they also live with a grandparent.

Although all of Sunny’s prior schooling was in English, she is having difficulty now. Teachers comment she seems to daydream, is not using “p”, “b”, “w”, “v”, “f” and the “c” sound properly in her speech and writing, and is largely unintelligible when she speaks. When she is attentive she follows directions well, participates in non-verbal classroom activities, and has strong computation skills.

What is going on with Sunny? Could she be culturally and linguistically different? Or might she have a disability?



# Key Question 1

Is the student's issue significantly different from similarly situated students?

Answering this question requires narrowing the pool of students down to those who have the most in common with the student in question.

For Sunny, which students would likely have the most in common with her?

- ✓ Korean
- ✓ Bilingual English Korean speakers
- ✓ Newcomers
- ✓ Female
- ✓ Eight-year-old third graders

What will you do if there are no similarly situated students at the school?

## Key Question 2

Does the student's culture, environment, or economic status have anything to do with the issue?

Can you form this question into three separate questions for Sunny?

Does her culture have anything to do with the issue?

Does her time spent in a US school and new country have anything to do with the issue?

Does her economic status have anything to do with the issue?

What answers do you come up with?

Is there additional information you need to answer these questions?

If so, how will you gather the information?

## Key Question 3

Has the student had chances to show his or her communication skills and content knowledge in his or her home language?

Sunny has been at your school for two weeks. Let's assume the answer is no.

What could be done at your school to give Sunny opportunities to demonstrate her skills and knowledge in Korean?

## Key Question 4

Have any concerns been raised by the student's parent(s)/family/guardian(s)?

Let's assume you do not know the answer to this question.

How would you get the answer to this question?

## Key Question 5

Is the student making progress?

How would you determine how to measure Sunny's progress?

Over what span of time will you measure progress?

# Who Is Huda?

Maha and her twin sister Huda are eighth graders who have been in US schools since the end of their fifth grade year. They came from Tangier, Morocco with their single mom, who was a bread baker.





# Who is Huda?



Images: <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2018/08/252894/court-of-auditors-moroccos-schools-not-achieving-basic-standards/>



# Who is Huda?





# Who Is Huda?

Maha and her twin sister Huda are eighth graders who have been in US schools since the end of their fifth grade year. They came from Tangier, Morocco with their single mom, who was a bread baker.

The family speaks a Moroccan dialect of Arabic, conversational Spanish, and enough French to sell bread at the family's bakery. The girls went to school from the age of 5, but had brief gaps in schooling when her mom could not pay the school fees. While Maha has advanced from a WIDA level 1 to 3 on ACCESS, Huda has struggled to reach a level 2.

This year is the first year Huda and Maha have been in separate classrooms. While Maha's teachers are not expressing concern about her performance, Huda speaks enthusiastically with her classmates in English, but has difficulty reading fluently, comprehending texts, and solving math equations.

Who is the real Huda? Why isn't she performing academically like her twin sister? Could she be culturally and linguistically different? Or might she have a disability?

# Key Question 1

Is the student's issue significantly different from similarly situated students?

Answering this question requires narrowing the pool of students down to those who have the most in common with the student in question.

For Huda, which students would likely have the most in common with her?

- ✓ Moroccan
- ✓ Darija speakers
- ✓ In the US for two years
- ✓ Female
- ✓ Eighth graders

What will you do if there are no similarly situated students at the school?

## Key Question 2

Does the student's culture, environment, or economic status have anything to do with the issue?

Can you form this question into three separate questions for Huda?

Does her culture have anything to do with the issue?

Does her time spent in a US school and new country have anything to do with the issue?

Does her economic status have anything to do with the issue?

What answers do you come up with?

Is there additional information you need to answer these questions?

If so, how will you gather the information?

## Key Question 3

Has the student had chances to show his or her communication skills and content knowledge in his or her home language?

Huda has been in US schools for two years. Let's assume the answer is, "Yes. Her third-grade teacher has let her respond to writing prompts in her home language."

What would you look for in her home language writing artifacts? Where could you get support in reviewing these artifacts?

## Key Question 4

Have any concerns been raised by the student's parent(s)/family/guardian(s)?

Let's assume mom drops the girls off at school one day, asks Huda's teacher how Huda is doing, and remarks that Huda has always been "slow."

What do you do next?

## Key Question 5

Is the student making progress?

How would you determine how to measure Huda's progress?

Over what span of time will you measure progress?

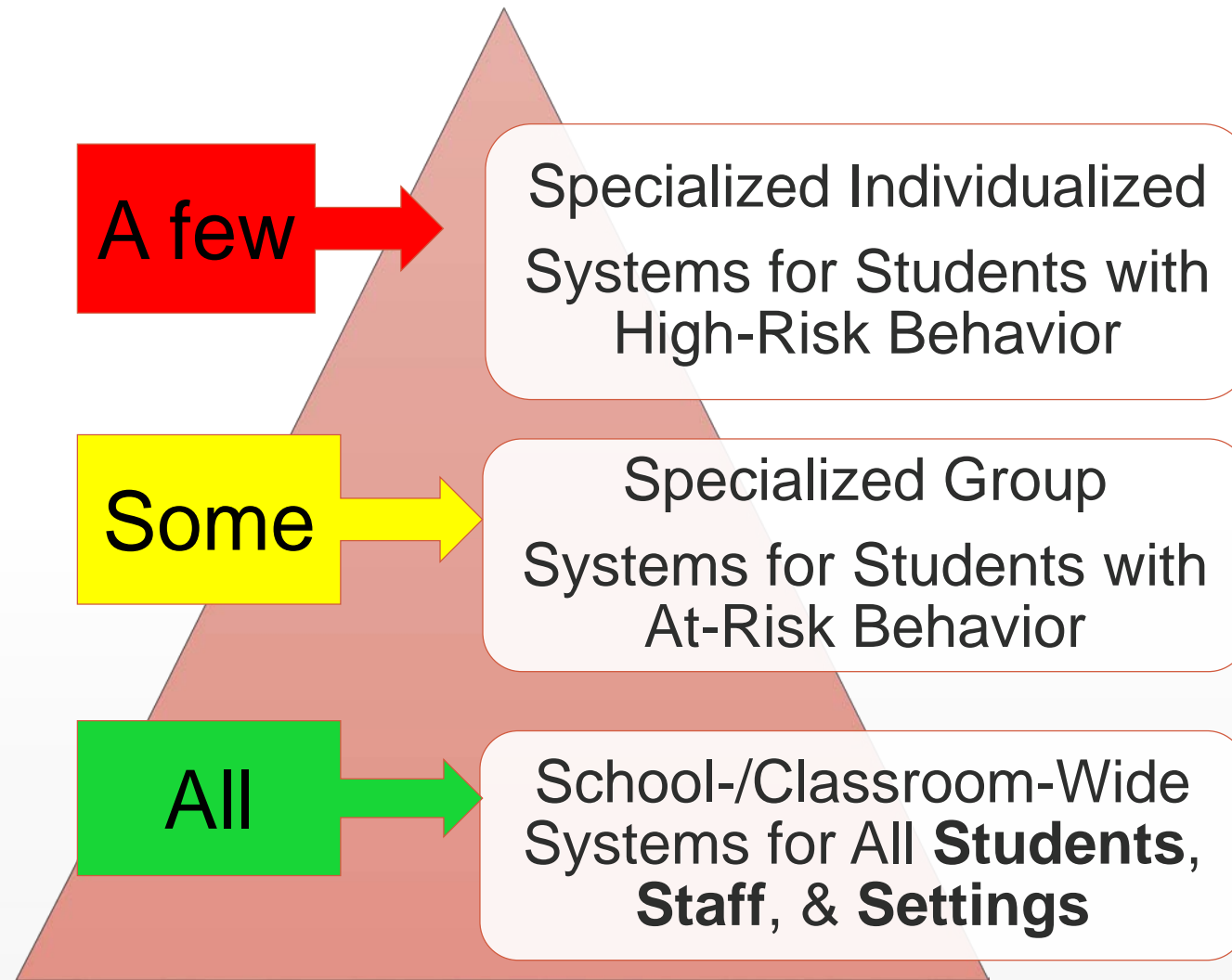


# Response to Intervention

*A Pre-Referral Measure*

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# Multi-Tiered Prevention Logic





# Tier 1: Universal

What is a Tier 1 intervention?

- Academic: Whole group, small group, differentiated, smart seating
- Behavior: School-wide expectations, classroom management, acknowledging behavior and responding to misbehavior

# EL Tier I Strategies

The teacher's strategies for supporting ELs within the classroom can include:

- Being aware that intentional planning for English language development in each language domain (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) is required for overall English language growth
- Knowing the EL's level of English language proficiency in each domain
- Being aware of what an EL can do with the English language at their level of English language proficiency
- Along with content objectives, planning lessons around an English language development objective
- Using scaffolds to support engagement with and completion of grade-level content tasks

# EL Tier I Strategies

**Be aware that intentional planning for English language development in each language domain (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) is required for overall English language growth.**

- Listening is easily overlooked, must be practiced, shows comprehension, teacher must set up the listening environment

# EL Tier I Strategies

**Know the EL's level of English language proficiency in each domain.**

In pre-K and K, use the listening and speaking scores from the ELP screeners.

In 1-12, use the four domain scores on the screener and/or ACCESS.

Compare this against the [WIDA rubric](#).

Then make sure lesson delivery and assignments are designed with what an EL can do at that level.

# EL Tier I Strategies

**Be aware of what an EL can do with the English language at their level of English language proficiency.**

Beyond the WIDA 6 level rubric, teachers can use the [WIDA Can-Do Descriptors](#) to develop appropriate activities and assessments for ELs at their level. Once a student masters the Can-Dos at their level, the teachers can develop activities at the next higher level.

# EL Tier I Strategies

**Along with content objectives, plan lessons around an English language development objective.**

Use the following steps to create a language objective:

- 1) Be clear about the grade, content area and [WIDA standard](#), content standard, and language domain.
- 2) Decide what you want the EL to do (sort, point, compare, evaluate) with language.
- 3) Describe what the EL will do with language in the standard – this is the language objective!

Level 1: List health goals using word banks and graphic organizers in L1 or L2.

Level 3: Explain health goals using sentence starter, “I chose \_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_.”

# EL Tier I Strategies

**Use scaffolds to support engagement with and completion of grade-level content tasks.**

Add scaffolds to the language objective. Describe what the EL will **do** with language **in the standard** using specific **supports**.

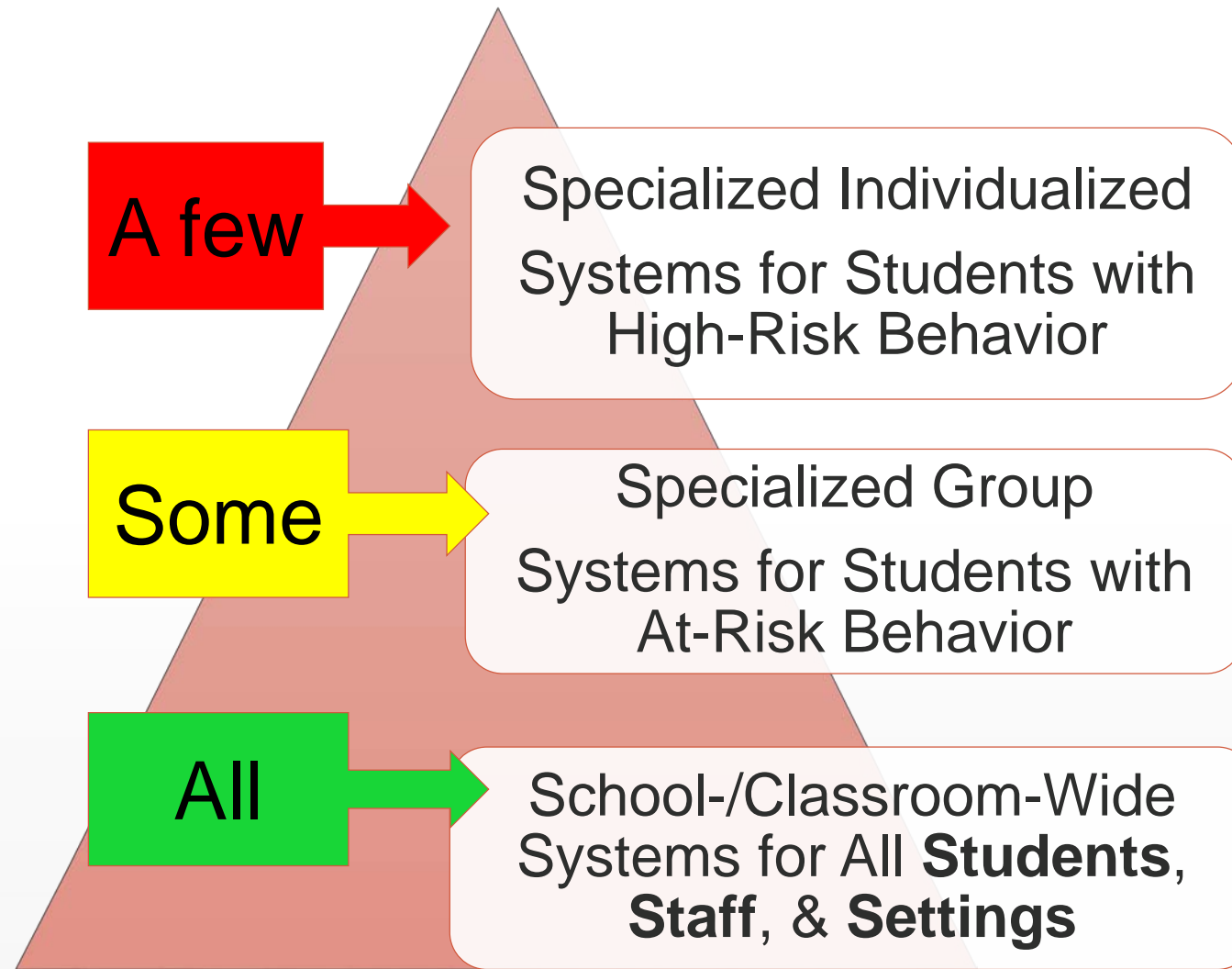
Level 2: State health goals using word banks. “I want to eat balanced meals.”

Level 5: Elaborate reasons for health goals. “I know that I need to add more cardio instead of weight lifting because I don’t have the highest metabolism...”

ELs with lower proficiency may benefit from more scaffolds in a single lesson than an EL with higher proficiency. An EL reaching full proficiency may not need any scaffolds.



# Multi-Tiered Prevention Logic





**DIVISION OF TEACHING  
& LEARNING**

**Professional Development  
Training Opportunities**

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# TAL Professional Development Team

The Division of Teaching and Learning's (TAL) Professional Development Team works to deliver responsive systems of professional learning and high-quality technical support to District LEAs and schools. The team supports a wide range of topics and interventions through professional development, direct LEA/school-based support, the facilitation of communities of practice, and through city-wide convenings.

# TAL Professional Development Team

I have a question about...	Point of Contact
Training and Technical Assistance Manager	<a href="mailto:Jenye.Fletcher@dc.gov">Jenye.Fletcher@dc.gov</a>
English Language Acquisition Standards and Instruction	<a href="mailto:Jennifer.Norton@dc.gov">Jennifer.Norton@dc.gov</a> <a href="mailto:Anika.Harris@dc.gov">Anika.Harris@dc.gov</a>
Multilingual Education	<a href="mailto:Santiago.Sanchez@dc.gov">Santiago.Sanchez@dc.gov</a>
Literacy and English Language Arts Standards and Instruction	<a href="mailto:Ashleigh.Tillman@dc.gov">Ashleigh.Tillman@dc.gov</a>
STEM Integration and Early STEM Education	<a href="mailto:Lauren.Allen@dc.gov">Lauren.Allen@dc.gov</a>
Specialized Education (Secondary Transition, Inclusion, IEP Quality)	<a href="mailto:Jennifer.Carpenter@dc.gov">Jennifer.Carpenter@dc.gov</a>
Section 504, Response to Intervention, Child Find, Student Support Teams	<a href="mailto:Angela.Awonaike@dc.gov">Angela.Awonaike@dc.gov</a>
Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support, School Climate, Restorative Justice	<a href="mailto:Jessica.Dulay@dc.gov">Jessica.Dulay@dc.gov</a> <a href="mailto:Nakanya.Magby@dc.gov">Nakanya.Magby@dc.gov</a> <a href="mailto:Kristian.Lenderman@dc.gov">Kristian.Lenderman@dc.gov</a>
School Turnaround and School Improvement	<a href="mailto:Tiphannie.Scroggins@dc.gov">Tiphannie.Scroggins@dc.gov</a>

# Resources

OSSE's *Delivering Education Services to English Learners: Policies and Procedures for Administrators, Instructional Leaders, and Teachers in the District of Columbia* is now available for download.

Quality Programs for English Learners - A School Readiness Reflection Tool is available in editable form [here](#).

OSSE's EL webpage is [www.osse.dc.org/page/english-learners-els](http://www.osse.dc.org/page/english-learners-els).

On-site technical assistance and EL program support is available! EL programs may contact [Anika.Harris@dc.gov](mailto:Anika.Harris@dc.gov) or [Jennifer.Norton@dc.gov](mailto:Jennifer.Norton@dc.gov). Dual language programs may contact [Santiago.Sanchez@dc.gov](mailto:Santiago.Sanchez@dc.gov).

# Upcoming EL and Dual Language Events

Subscribe to the new Teaching and Learning PD Bulletin by [clicking here!](#)

## WIDA Self-Paced eLearning Courses

### Secondary Transition Planning for Dually-Identified English Learners

Title: Additive Bilingualism: Practices and Intercultural Exchanges When Delivering Instruction in Spanish (Content and materials will be in Spanish only)

Title: Biliterate Writing Trajectory (Content and Materials will be in Spanish only)

Title: Dual Language Leadership Part 1: Classroom Observations and Feedback of Dual Language Classrooms

# Professional Development Opportunities

The OSSE Teaching and Learning Team offers a wide variety of professional development opportunities.

Ways to stay informed:

1. LEA Look Forward Weekly Newsletter [osse.dc.gov/newsroom/newsletters](https://osse.dc.gov/newsroom/newsletters)
2. Teaching and Learning PD Calendar
3. OSSE Events Calendar [osse.dc.gov/events](https://osse.dc.gov/events)



The screenshot shows the header of the LEA Look Forward newsletter. It features the OSSE logo (a red square with three white stars and the letters 'OSSE') and the text 'District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education' above the main title 'LEA LOOK FORWARD' in large, bold, black letters. Below the title, the date 'Oct. 26-Nov. 1, 2016' is displayed in red. A red-bordered box contains the section 'In this issue...' followed by a list of 14 items, each preceded by a red bullet point and containing a red hyperlink.

District of Columbia  
Office of the State Superintendent of Education  
**LEA LOOK FORWARD**

Oct. 26-Nov. 1, 2016

**In this issue...**

- [2017 DC Green Ribbon Schools Application Released](#)
- [Join RaiseDC for the Graduation Pathways Summit](#)
- [SLED Training](#)
- [Introduction to Secondary Transition for Middle Schools](#)
- [ESSA Engagement Update: Surveys and Upcoming Focus Groups](#) (webinar recap, surveys closing, and future engagement opportunities) (reminder)
- [Teacher Data Collections](#) (update and reminder)
- [Access to Emergency Epinephrine in Schools Amendment Act of 2015](#) (reminder)
- [OSSE Statewide Student Information System Lunch and Learn](#) (reminder)
- [ACCESS for ELLs Roster Preparation - Rosters Due By Nov. 22, 2016](#) (reminder)
- [LEA Institute: 'It Takes a City: Bridging LEAs to Resources for Enhanced Student Outcomes'](#) (reminder)
- [LEA Membership Tracker](#) (reminder)
- [New Release - English Learner Guidebook](#) (reminder)
- [National Student/Parent Mock Election Opportunity](#)
- [Dates to Remember](#)





Thank you!