



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF

EDUCATION

Strategies to Support English Learners During Learning at Home

DC Public Schools and public charter schools have prepared remote educational activities to allow all students the opportunity to continue developing their academic abilities during the coronavirus (COVID-19) closures. All students, including English learners (ELs), and their families should be able to access and engage with the online and paper materials and activities provided by their schools.¹ This document provides strategies to support EL students during distance learning, and beyond.

Strategy 1: Disaggregate participation of ELs in attendance/engagement trackers.

Tracking and disaggregating the participation of specific groups of students, including students with disabilities and EL students, during distance learning can help a school to understand if its distance learning practices are effective for these special populations. When schools look at participation data specifically for their EL students, they can use that information to determine how they can better help ELs to access and engage the remote curriculum. Trackers should be used weekly to identify if EL students are not participating or have lower engagement than their non-EL peers and to take note of patterns or trends with specific subgroups or age groups of students. In this [sample tracker](#) to monitor student engagement, data can be filtered to disaggregate:

- If a student is EL and/or has an IEP;
- Which families/students lack the technology to participate in distance learning;
- Which families/students are facing other non-technology challenges that impede participation in distance learning;
- If students are not participating in specific courses; and
- If students are not participating on certain days or at certain times.

Intentional use of the data will help school staff to know which students to prioritize in engagement and outreach efforts, as well as strategize and problem-solve to overcome any barriers that families and students are experiencing with distance learning.

LEA Example: *“On a recent data pull I saw there were only two ELs whom we had not yet reached; I was able to follow up with their teachers and school leadership to get updates on their engagement. I can use the report to track weekly/bi-weekly reach out updates.”*

¹ For more information, refer to the [joint guidance from U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education](#), the [Language Access Act of 2004](#), [OSSE EL policy](#), and the [DC PSCB EL monitoring policy](#).

Strategy 2: Include families’ preferred language of communication in attendance/engagement trackers to help ensure language access.

Parents with limited English proficiency are entitled to meaningful communication in a language they can understand. Considering that ELs and their families may need language assistance to engage with the school and access the curriculum, especially during distance learning, the [sample tracker](#) can also be used to note the parent's preferred language of communication so that calls can be made with an interpreter if needed.

LEA Example: *“I used the columns in the spreadsheet for email, phone, and preferred language of communication to upload a list into a parent communication app that lets teachers send messages to parents in different languages.”*

Strategy 3: Communicate with families in a language they can understand.

Providing written translation and oral interpretation helps ensure meaningful communication with families. Doing so also demonstrates that schools value their students’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds, which is one of [OSSE’s foundational principles](#) for serving EL students.

Numerous translation software programs are available to make it easy to communicate with families in various languages from afar. Examples of such programs are provided below. LEAs should evaluate which tools are suitable for use. Web-based translation software should be used with caution and is appropriate only when the translated document accurately conveys the meaning of the source document. Any use of web-based automated translation services must comply with the requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regarding personally identifiable information from a student’s educational record.

Program	Overview	How to Use During Distance Learning
Microsoft Translator App	Offers translations of text and real-time speech. Parents receive written translations of teachers’ speech/comments on their device.	See here for steps on how families can access translations of your remote video/conference calls. (Amharic support not available)
Remind App	Allows two-way messaging with automatic translation.	For communicating with families via messaging. Ideal for basic messages, e.g. meeting invitations. (Amharic support not available)
Talking Points App	Allows two-way messaging with automatic translation.	For communicating with families via messaging. Ideal for basic messages, e.g. meeting invitations. (Amharic support not available)
Microsoft 365	Has a translate feature currently available for Word, Excel, OneNote, and PowerPoint	Particularly helpful for translating documents. For details, see the English or

Translate Feature	to automatically translate documents in commonly spoken languages.	Spanish instructions.
ClassDojo	Student and parent communication app that translates into 30 languages.	For communicating with families and sharing student assignments, schedules, and messages

Tips for Working with an Interpreter

Whenever possible, language assistance must be provided by appropriate, competent staff or outside resources. Students, siblings, friends, or untrained staff should not be relied upon as interpreters. The tips below can help you work with a language interpreter effectively.

Before the meeting, if possible, brief the interpreter on the potential parent or person who needs interpretation and what the meeting is about. Allow the interpreter to know what will be covered in the meeting, e.g., terminology, context or scenario.

Interpreters need to repeat everything that is said in the room. During the meeting, the interpreter:

- Needs to be next to the client at all times to hear the client, as well as interpret back what the provider is saying to the client (if in person);
- Needs complete silence in the background (if online);
- Has control over the flow of information;
- May ask for clarification as well as parents and other staff members in the room;
- Cannot add or omit anything;
- Cannot give opinions; and
- Must keep everything that is said confidential.

During the meeting, it is helpful for the speaker to:

- Speak slowly and clearly;
- Use concrete sentences;
- Use clear, plain language;
- Avoid idioms and jargon;
- Pause every 2-3 sentences; and
- Refrain from having side conversations.

When there are acronyms involved, be patient because the interpreter usually has to spell the acronym out. Therefore, stating the actual name may be more appropriate than using the acronym.

Following these tips will help the interpreter keep up with the speaker and provide the client with the information while keeping the flow of the conversation.

Strategy 4: Bring key staff together to collaborate on promoting ELs' participation in distance learning.

EL teachers, general education teachers, special education teachers, school counselors and other key staff should work collaboratively to support EL students. One way to do this is to jointly analyze participation data and coordinate outreach to families. Together they can problem-solve to address barriers that families and students may be experiencing with distance learning.

LEA examples: *"I meet with the ELL teachers weekly and ask them if there are any students they are having trouble reaching. I then check the contact logs and see if other teachers made attempts and also check on siblings at other campuses within our LEA. Then, I email all the staff members who are connected with the family so they can help the ELL teacher know who was successful in making contact and how they did it. This has been helpful so far in engaging some of our disengaged ELs and their families. Our school is focused on inclusivity and is doing a great job at looking at all students, so ELs have been a part of all the conversations when leadership and teachers are following up on who has not been contacted or needs further support."*

"Our EL coordinator, school counselor, and school culture coordinator joined together to make plans for how to reach out to and/or support all of the kids identified through the tracker as having the highest level of need, most challenges, or who were completely disengaged. In most cases, grade level teachers and advisors already have a sense of what the barriers to engagement are, so this 'Task Force' is collecting that information in the tracker as well. The EL coordinator shared the preliminary data about ELs with the principal and will meet again with the principal and special populations director with the goal of having teachers use the data to reflect on how to make the tasks they are assigning more accessible for ELs and other students whose parents are unable to assist them in completing their assignments. As an extension of student and family engagement work, we are also doing more in-depth empathy interviews with a sample of EL families across the LEA and looking for emerging patterns that were not exposed through the tracker."

Questions?

For questions, contact Jennifer Norton, manager of English learner supports, at Jennifer.Norton@dc.gov.

For resources and additional information on the District of Columbia Government's response to coronavirus (COVID-19), please visit coronavirus.dc.gov.