



District of Columbia
Office of the State Superintendent of Education

LEA English Learner Program Improvement Strategies (SY2021-22)

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Table of Contents




Introduction.....	1
Principle: Value the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of all English learner students.....	1
Strategy 1: (Re)train all teachers on culturally responsive approaches to amplify English learner students’ self-concept and agency in the classroom.	1
Strategy 2: Use trauma-informed approaches to supporting English learner students’ well-being.	3
Strategy 3: Proactively encourage home language and literacy development.	4
Principle: Partner with families, educators, system leaders and communities to nurture English learner students’ linguistic, academic, social and emotional development.	5
Strategy 4: Establish a two-way family engagement plan that prioritizes English learner families in defining their role as partners rather than helpers.	5
Strategy 5: Empower English learner families to have an active role in their child’s learning and success.	6
Strategy 6: Provide a space and opportunities for English learner families to be advocates and share their views with decision makers.....	7
Principle: Provide English learner students access to grade-level academic content and English language instruction that are appropriate for advancing their language proficiency and academic achievement.....	8
Strategy 7: Train all teachers on scaffolds to support English learners’ content and language development.....	8
Strategy 8: Bring a focus to English learners with disabilities to ensure both language development and disability-related services are addressed and provided collaboratively.....	9
Strategy 9: Set up or strengthen systems for successful teacher collaboration.....	9
Principle: Use multiple sources of data to inform and refine English learner programs, instruction and assessment.	11
Strategy 10: Refine how your LEA’s English learner program is implemented for in-person learning.....	11
Strategy 11: Administer a WIDA-aligned benchmark assessment at the beginning of the school year to guide grades K-12 students’ placement in your LEA’s English learner program services.	13
Strategy 12: Gather and analyze students’ use of language in the classroom to help drive instruction.....	14
LEA Self-Reflection and Next Steps	15
Acknowledgements.....	16

Introduction

As local education agencies (LEAs) prepare for a successful start of the 2021-22 school year, English learners must be central to schools’ vision of success, and LEAs’ plan should include strategies that specifically address and support students who are English learners. Our goal is for all DC’s English learners will have equitable, meaningful access to high-quality academic and linguistic programs in an inclusive, welcoming environment. Designed specifically for the context of the 2021-22 school year, this guide is grounded in:

- [OSSE updated continuous education principles](#);
- [OSSE’s foundational principles for serving English learners](#); and
- [DC’s state English language development \(ELD\) standards, the WIDA ELD Standards, 2020 edition](#).

For each of the foundational principles, you will find actionable, assets-driven strategies, tools and resources to help LEAs take action to accelerate learning for English learners as valued members of the school community.

Guiding Principles for Continuous Education 2021-22	
 <p>SAFE REOPENING</p>	Ensure a safe reopening of school buildings for all students and staff
 <p>STUDENT & STAFF WELL-BEING</p>	Support the physical, social-emotional, mental, and behavioral health of our school communities
 <p>ACCELERATED LEARNING</p>	Assess impact of interrupted instruction and accelerate learning, at home and in person, for all students
Foundational Principles	WIDA English Language Development Standards Framework Big Ideas
Value the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of all English learner students.	Equity of opportunity and access Collaboration among stakeholders Integration of content and language Functional approach to language development
Partner with families, educators, system leaders, and communities to nurture English learner students’ linguistic, academic, social and emotional development.	
Provide English learner students access to grade-level academic content and English language instruction that are appropriate for advancing their language proficiency and academic achievement.	
Use multiple sources of data to inform and continually refine English learner programs, services, instruction and assessment.	

Principle: Value the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of all English learner students.

English learner students are all teachers' students and are valued members of DC schools. As described in the [WIDA Can Do Philosophy](#), every student has unique assets, and multilingualism and multiculturalism are valued resources. When all educators understand the experiences that are unique to English learner students, they are better prepared to cultivate positive relationships.

The social-emotional wellness of English learner students is influenced by the unique cultural, linguistic and contextual factors of their lived experiences. It is important to acknowledge the assets and resilience of English learners—both immigrants and US-born—economically, linguistically and culturally. Schools can help provide needed supports as families navigate a global pandemic in a language, culture and education system which may be new to them.

Strategy 1: (Re)train all teachers on culturally responsive approaches to amplify English learner students' self-concept and agency in the classroom.

Preparing all school staff to recognize and value English learners' unique experiences, strengths and needs in the context of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the return to in-person learning will help ensure their success this school year. Using [WIDA's Guiding Principles of Language Development](#), schools can challenge biases and leverage English learner students' languages and cultures to help develop their independence and encourage their agency in learning. English learners grow their academic and English language skills when opportunities for learning leverage their individual experiences, characteristics, abilities, and levels of language proficiency. LEAs should train or retrain all staff on:

- Socio-cultural considerations for English learner students,
- Implicit bias training for staff, and
- Culturally responsive pedagogy. b

The gaps in academic equity that affect English learner students are rooted in historical and social factors that created the current US education system. Inequities in educational experiences for students of differing racial, ethnic and social groups became more evident during the pandemic. However, educators can begin to address them during the return to in-person learning, in part, by utilizing culturally responsive practices. Drawing on one of the four Big Ideas behind [WIDA's English Language Development Standards Framework, Equity of Opportunity and Access](#), educational leaders and teachers are encouraged to ask themselves:

- What attitudes and biases do I hold about intelligence, learning, and the students I teach?
- How do these biases manifest in the classroom through my behavior?
- What changes must I make to my instructional plans and materials to educate all students equitably?

Tools and Resources	How to Use
WIDA Can Do Philosophy and WIDA's Guiding Principles of Language Development	Reflect with staff on beliefs about English learners and whether staff's thoughts, words and actions are assets-based. Use OSSE's foundational principles and the WIDA Can Do philosophy to develop your LEAs' own belief statements.
Learning Within the Context of Culture (Brown University)	Guide staff to use these strategies to enhance student engagement by reducing the pressure underrepresented students may feel to distance themselves from their cultural norms in instructional settings.
Implementing District and School Policies and Practices to Support Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Institute of Education Sciences)	Use this webinar to learn how to use data to change learning environments to those that are more equitable and pose fewer barriers to implementing culturally relevant practices.
Best Practices for Serving English Learners and Their Families (Learning for Justice)	Gain culturally responsive tools to support English learners in instruction, engage families, improve classroom culture and create school policies.
Culturally Responsive Activity (For students and/or school staff) (OSSE)	Open the door for students and/or school staff to recognize how diverse communities in the US have unified to advance public education for English learners.

Strategy 2: Use trauma-informed approaches to supporting English learner students’ well-being.

The drastic changes caused by the pandemic may have induced chronic levels of stress in our students and their families. These changes may have been magnified for English learners due to social, cultural and linguistic differences and/or because of circumstances surrounding the family possibly experiencing refugee status, lack of documentation, low income, or isolation from their family nucleus in their home county. Schools can proactively prepare to deal with the effects of stress on English learners by acknowledging to themselves and with students the difficulties of the past year and the strengths they bring to the physical learning environment. LEAs should make all staff aware of:

- Social emotional and wellness practices for the classroom.
- The process for referring English learners to counselors, including awareness around the potential need for counseling in the student’s or family’s native language.
- The legal rights of immigrant students, including those who may be undocumented.

Tools and Resources	How to Use
Secondary Traumatic Stress for Educators (National Child Traumatic Stress Network)	Start strong by addressing your own wellness by learning the risk factors for and signs of secondary traumatic stress in educators, as well as techniques for prevention and self-care.
Using a Strengths-Based Approach with ELs: Supporting Students Living with Trauma, Violence and Chronic Stress (Colorín Colorado)	Plan for identifying students’ strengths and assets in order to form trusting relationships in the instructional space. Guide staff in considering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are we integrating the resources our English learner students have access to? • What assumptions are we making that prevent us from fully understanding our English learner students? • Are we actively listening to our English learner students about their experiences?
How to address the effects of trauma in the English language classroom (British Council)	Begin to recognize your own limitations and boundaries as you plan to welcome students back to in-person learning in order to prevent compassion fatigue.
Safe Spaces Fact Sheet for Families and School Staff (US Department of Education)	Post, distribute and discuss with school staff and families.
Sample Social Emotional Learning Activity (OSSE)	Provide staff these activities to let students express their feelings and unique realities.
Immigration Resources and Supports for LEAs; Immigration and Rights in School (OSSE) (OSSE)	Use this resource to remind staff: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all EL students are undocumented. • It is illegal to ask students about their citizenship status.

Strategy 3: Proactively encourage home language and literacy development.

Multilingual families provide unique linguistic and cultural assets that help English learner students to develop critical thinking and develop metalanguage awareness. During distance learning, many English learner students communicated mostly in their first language if it is the primary spoken language in their home. As bilingual/multilingual learners, English learner students bring cognitive flexibility and resilience from their lived experiences and versatile backgrounds, and research shows that strong home language literacy skills help students build strong second language proficiency.¹ Schools can proactively and continuously encourage families to support their students’ home language and literacy development during in-person learning.

Tools and Resources	How to Use
WIDA Focus Bulletin: Language and Culture	Adapt the authentic example of partnering with families to foster home language and literacy development at your LEA.
Why reading to your kids in your home language will help them become better readers (Colorín Colorado)	Share with families to help show how multilingualism is a superpower.
PBS Parents	Share this bilingual resource (English-Spanish) with parents of children ages 2 through 8 for tips on how they can promote socioemotional and academic learning at home.
Ready Rosie	Have parents explore and use the Modeled Moments videos to foster academic and wellness-themed conversations with grades pre-K to 5 students. Videos and captioning are available in multiple languages.

Action Steps Checklist for Strategies 1 – 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Identify gaps in your LEA’s knowledge of supporting English learners’ socio-emotional health and seek out learning opportunities (professional learning, networking, webinars, books, etc.). <input type="checkbox"/> Guide teachers and staff to understand English learners’ perspectives in the current context. <input type="checkbox"/> Guide staff to create space in lessons for students to express their COVID-19 realities. <input type="checkbox"/> Provide families resources that encourage home language literacy.

¹ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2017). Promoting the educational success of children and youth learning English: Promising futures (Consensus Study Report). The National Academies Press. doi.org/10.17226/24677

Principle: Partner with families, educators, system leaders and communities to nurture English learner students’ linguistic, academic, social and emotional development.

When you work with English learners, you work with their families as well. You partner with families to get to know your students and support their language development and learning. Families, teachers and school leaders have information that can be shared as part of an ongoing reciprocal relationship. Together you support the socioemotional, language development and learning of each student.

Strategy 4: Establish a two-way family engagement plan that prioritizes English learner families in defining their role as partners rather than helpers.

Families benefit from partnering with school leaders and teachers while learning more about language development and learning in general and as applicable to their own children. Family engagement includes the systems and practices used by educational leaders and teachers to enhance connections between families and their community. It also takes many forms, and you can use a variety of strategies to build meaningful relationships with multilingual families. The tools shared below are some examples of family engagement practices that contribute to mutually respectful and reciprocal relationships that benefit everyone involved.

Tools and Resources	How to Use
"All About Me" Book Your Family is Extraordinary Protocol Your family is Extraordinary Worksheet (Build Initiative)	Engage families in creating “All About Me” books with their children. Families can use the resource to communicate their child’s and family’s extraordinary strengths to their child’s teacher.
School-Home Communication Tool - Spanish, Amharic, French, Vietnamese, Korean, and Chinese (OSSE)	Provide these sample checklists to multilingual families, school leaders and teachers to help guide effective two-way communication between families and teachers.
Culturally Responsive Approaches to English to Spanish Translations (National Child Traumatic Stress Network) Interpretation and Translation Tips	Use these resources in trainings on best practices in working with interpreters and translators to communicate more effectively with multilingual families.
Conversations to share data with families (Build Initiative)	Guide teachers to prepare for discussions with families on formative assessment data, goals and plans to achieve those goals with the families.

Strategy 5: Empower English learner families to have an active role in their child’s learning and success.

Family engagement is a big task. Striving to create and implement practices that reflect the diversity of families can seem overwhelming. However, you can use these tools to make small, but meaningful changes. English learners are learning wherever they are – at home, in your school, and in the community. LEAs can lead educators in connecting the learning that happens at home with the learning that happens in classrooms.

Tools and Resources	How to Use
Everyday Actions as Opportunities to Learn	<p>Follow these recommendations to create family-focused handouts, emails, short videos, or whatever else works for multilingual families at your LEA.</p> <p>Adapt the examples to match you LEA’s families’ interests, skills, language and culture.</p>
Reading Tip Sheets for Parents (Colorín Colorado)	<p>Share these reading tips with parents, which are available in multiple languages.</p>
School-Home Communication Tool - Spanish, Amharic, French, Vietnamese, Korean, and Chinese (OSSE)	<p>See page 11 for a form that teachers can share with families to help them to prepare for a meaningful parent-teacher conference.</p> <p>It is important that teachers share this form with families at least two days before the date scheduled for the conference to allow families time to prepare.</p>
Parent Power Poder para los padres (US Department of Education)	<p>Share these tips with families and discuss how they can take to help their child learn at each step of the way to ensure success in school and life.</p>

Strategy 6: Provide a space and opportunities for English learner families to be advocates and share their views with decision makers.

One way to enhance a school’s sense of community and engage multilingual families is to bring people together with a shared goal of supporting diversity. In many settings this is called a *diversity team* and includes volunteers, staff, family members, and community representatives who work together to ensure that multilingual families feel welcome. Members of this group can use skills in their home languages to spread the word about the way your school welcome diverse families. They can also help you find or make culturally and linguistically responsive materials and participate in events and celebrations.

Tools and Resources	How to Use
Working with families on advisory bodies (Build Initiative)	Use this resource designed to plan and implement a strategy for creating family advisory teams for the school or LEA.
Engaging Families Toolkit (Build the Out of School Network)	Self-assess the school’s stage in family engagement. The checklists and sample action plan can be considered by school leaders to develop strategies to strengthen family engagement.
Family engagement framework (English) Marco de compromiso familiar (Spanish) (California Department of Education)	This toolkit is organized into several sections, each one includes <i>key questions</i> for a district family engagement team consider, along with <i>equity questions</i> to help the team apply an equity lens, to dig deeper and strengthen the engagement of all of the diverse groups of families. In addition, each section includes tools to support the work of the LEA/school team.

Action Steps Checklist
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Assess the current school plan for parent engagement <input type="checkbox"/> Update your LEA’s engagement plan with culturally-responsive, two-way opportunities that include multilingual families <input type="checkbox"/> Identify specific opportunities for multilingual families to participate in school learning, social initiatives and decision-making

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

English learner students are everyone’s students. All school staff have collective responsibility for English learner students. All educators need to provide English learner students instruction that both advances their skills in English and advances their academic content growth. Whether in-person, hybrid, or distance, English learner supports should be effective, aligned to research, and evaluated regularly, as outlined in [Castañeda v. Pickard 648 F.2d 989, 1013 \(1981\)](#).

Strategy 7: Train all teachers on scaffolds to support English learners’ content and language development.

Drawing on one of the four Big Ideas behind [WIDA’s English Language Development Standards Framework, Integration of Language and Content](#), educators should make evident the mutually influential nature of academic content and English language learning. To optimize all teaching and learning time, all teachers will benefit from (re)training on appropriate scaffolds to support English learner students’ access to grade-level content while also advancing their proficiency in English. This is even more important following extended distance learning in the 2020-21 school year to ensure that all educators are prepared to accelerate English learners’ learning in every class setting including content and enrichment classes.

Tools and Resources	How to Use
Scaffolding Learning for Multilingual Students in Math (WIDA) Scaffolding Instruction for English Learners: Q&A with Diane Staehr Fenner	Grab and use these ideas scaffolding practices in order to increase English learners’ access to academic content while developing independence in understanding and using academic English.
District of Columbia’s Comprehensive Literacy Plan (CLP) (OSSE)	Use pages 42-50 of DC’s newly released CLP for common literacy practices to support English learners.
Professional Learning Planning Workbook (Learning Forward)	Follow the seven steps provided to use data and develop a plan to develop teachers’ skills and achieve schoolwide goals.
Professional Learning Session Kit: Supporting English Learners in the Four Domains of Language (OSSE)	Lead your own professional learning session using these 90-minute training templates that focus on English language development instruction by domain. The link allows access to OSSE’s webinar recordings, school-based facilitator’s guide, and companion activities and materials.
Teaching and Learning Professional Development Opportunities (OSSE)	Assign staff to attend OSSE’s professional learning opportunities for DC educators. (No cost for DC LEAs)

Strategy 8: Bring a focus to English learners with disabilities to ensure both language development and disability-related services are addressed and provided collaboratively.

English learners with disabilities require special consideration during remote learning and school reopening, given their intersecting special education and English language development needs. LEAs are encouraged to focus on specific ways to support their students who are dually-identified as English learners and as having disabilities.

Tools and Resources	How to Use
Restart & Recovery: Supporting English Learners with Disabilities During Remote Learning & School Reopening (CCSSO)	Compare the five recommendations to your LEA’s practices and self-reflect on systemic improvements to focus on ensuring the success of students who are dually identified.
Instruction for ELs with Significant Cognitive Disabilities (WIDA)	Use this webinar to learn about instructional strategies for English learners with significant cognitive disabilities.

Strategy 9: Set up or strengthen systems for successful teacher collaboration.

Drawing on one of the four Big Ideas behind [WIDA’s English Language Development Standards Framework, Collaboration Among Stakeholders](#), consider how the expertise of English language specialists, content area and enrichment teachers, administrators, families and students themselves can inform high-quality educational experiences for English learner students. Make sure English learner teachers are not working in a silo. All teachers need to be collaborating on understanding students’ strengths, needs, and learning targets for the English learner students they serve. Collaboration should focus on putting supports into place so that appropriate and achievable language goals are embedded in lessons and activities. This is key to ensuring that English learner students are provided supports that help them advance language development while also learning academic content.

At the district or school level, administrative leadership can establish the expectation that collaboration will occur, and design systems for successful implementation, such as:

- Stating educators’ roles and collective responsibilities for English learner students;
- Providing regularly scheduled planning time;
- Providing models for collaborative conversations; and
- Ensuring all educators receive professional learning opportunities on serving students who are EL and students with disabilities.

Tools and Resources	How to Use
<p>Sample templates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative weekly and daily planning template • Reflection and discussion templates (New York State Education Department) 	<p>Work in teams to adapt these templates so they reflect your staff's needs. Set up routines on their use that can be maintained across learning environments. Model best practices and collaborative conversations that focus on students' successes and needs.</p>
<p>Webinar recordings on collaboration and co-teaching to support EL students (Andrea Honigsfeld)</p>	<p>Preview these webinars to determine LEA leadership's desired approach to collaboration. Facilitate group viewing and discussion of the webinar recordings to train staff on collaborative practices. Leverage technology for collaboration even as you shift across learning environments.</p>
<p>60-Minute Co-planning Protocol (Marilyn Friend)</p>	<p>Support the establishment and maintenance of effective teacher collaboration processes with this tool.</p>

Action Steps Checklist for Strategies 7-9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Schedule professional development for all staff on how to teach English learner students effectively. <input type="checkbox"/> Make collaboration a priority by putting training, routines, modeling and tools in place <input type="checkbox"/> Make English learners with disabilities a priority in collaboration and monitoring to fine-tune supports.

Principle: Use multiple sources of data to inform and refine English learner programs, instruction and assessment.

Strategy 10: Refine how your LEA’s English learner program is implemented for in-person learning.

English learner students may have been communicating less frequently in English this past year and may exhibit some temporary regression in their English language skills upon return to in-person learning. Younger students may revert back to a silent period before they feel comfortable using English at school again. Older students may feel more comfortable communicating in their home language before using English again. Students may have also strengthened their home language skills, which allows for students to further leverage these skills during social and academic conversations.

Given these factors and the return to in-person learning, innovative practices are needed to move students’ language proficiency and academic content knowledge forward. As LEAs implement their continuous education plans, they should use lessons learned review and refine English learner programming. Data sources for this review should include both qualitative and quantitative data such as:

- Student perspectives;
- Family perspectives;
- Teacher perspectives;
- Student attendance rates; (available in the [Early Access to EL Data Application](#))
- Work completion rates;
- Work samples;
- Grades/summative assessment scores; and more.

Tools and Resources	How to Use
Tips to Address Learning Loss Among English Learners (Ellevation)	Plan interventions to address the effects of long-term school closures.
English Learner Program Model Overviews (OSSE)	Use the program model overviews to deepen your fidelity to the English learner program model best for your students.
Tools and Resources for Evaluating the Effectiveness of a District’s EL Program (US Department of Education)	Use Chapter 9 to consider data points for analyzing your LEA’s English learner program. Collaborate with your LEA’s leaders to uncover your English learner program’s strengths and areas of growth.
Early Access to EL Data Application (OSSE)	Review the Early Access to EL Data Qlik App training and use the data use guiding questions to plan for scheduling, ensuring staff and resources, and providing language access.

Strategy 11: Administer a WIDA-aligned benchmark assessment at the beginning of the school year to guide grades K-12 students’ placement in your LEA’s English learner program services.

Given the lack of ACCESS scores for one or more of the past two years, LEAs are encouraged to administer a valid and reliable language assessment to help set annual goals and determine appropriate services for students who are English learners. It is important to note that only an ACCESS composite score of 5.0 or higher may be used to exit from English learner services.

Tools and Resources	How to Use
WIDA MODEL webpage	WIDA MODEL scores can be used to predict student performance on ACCESS, provide information that informs instructional planning and other decisions related to students' education, and guide instructional and curricular decisions in the absence of score reports.
Sample goal template Sample Individualized Plan of EL Services (OSSE) Goal-setting examples from LEAs	Use these sample templates as a guide for developing your own annual language development goals plan.

Strategy 12: Gather and analyze students’ use of language in the classroom to help drive instruction.

Evidence of classroom-based language is a critically important complement to annual ACCESS English language proficiency scores ([Heritage, Walqui, and Linquanti, 2013](#)). After using ACCESS or MODEL scores for program placement, classroom-based evidence of language should be collected regularly and analyzed to understand the range of students’ responses to the demands of specific instructional tasks and learning opportunities. Based on classroom language use data, educators adjust instructional supports for upcoming lessons and promote a variety of key language uses over time and across contexts (Heritage et al., 2013).

Tools and Resources	How to Use
WIDA Writing Rubric Grades 1-12 WIDA Writing Rubric Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten WIDA Speaking Rubric Grades 1-12 WIDA Speaking Rubric Kindergarten	Use these rubrics to rate students’ speaking and writing related to specific instructional tasks. Use the data to determine strengths and areas for more focused, explicit language instruction. Log speaking and writing data regularly to identify growth and trends.
Sample informal assessment tools and guidance (Colorín Colorado)	Do not re-invent the wheel! Instead use these example forms and approaches to make informal assessment an easy practice to sustain.

Action Steps Checklist
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Lead a review of what is working well and what needs to be improved in the English learner program and make necessary changes. <input type="checkbox"/> Collect beginning of year language assessment data to help make appropriate program placement decisions. <input type="checkbox"/> Incorporate language assessment into classroom practices to better understand students’ language use in listening, speaking, reading and writing across the curriculum.

LEA Self-Reflection and Next Steps

Strategies	At my LEAs, our implementation of this strategy is:			Next steps for my LEA are:
	Strong	In progress	Not started	
1. (Re)train <u>all</u> teachers on culturally responsive approaches to amplify English learner students' self-concept and agency in the classroom.				
2. Use trauma-informed approaches to supporting English learner students' well-being.				
3. Proactively encourage home language and literacy development.				
4. Establish a two-way family engagement plan that prioritizes English learner families in defining their role as partners rather than helpers.				
5. Empower English learner families to have an active role in their child's learning and success.				
6. Provide a space and opportunities for English learner families to be advocates and share their views with decision makers.				
7. Train all teachers on scaffolds to support English learners' content and language development.				
8. Bring a focus to English learners with disabilities to ensure both language development and disability-related services are addressed and provided collaboratively.				
9. Set up or strengthen systems for successful teacher collaboration.				
10. Refine how your LEA's English learner program is implemented for in-person learning.				
11. Administer a WIDA-aligned benchmark assessment at the beginning of the school year to guide grades K-12 students' placement in your LEA's English learner program services.				
12. Gather and analyze students' use of language in the classroom to help drive instruction.				

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For more details on OSSE's English learning policies and program supports, refer to the following OSSE webpages:

- [English Learner Policy and Programs](#)
- [English Learner Instructional Resources](#)
- [Dual Language Resources](#)
- [Professional Development for Educators](#)