



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF

EDUCATION

Serving English Learners During Distance Learning: Frequently Asked Questions

(June 30, 2020)

Background

As a part of the District's response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) is offering this document of frequently asked questions on the responsibilities of states and local education agencies (LEAs) to English learners (ELs) and their parents during extended school closures and distance learning. These FAQs accompany guidance issued by the US Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, which can be accessed [here](#).

Scope

This document contains guidance on LEA responsibilities under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), other federal laws related to ELs, District Municipal Regulations 5-E3101, the DC Language Access Act, and state EL policies and procedures¹. This document does not impose any additional requirements beyond those included in applicable federal and local laws and regulations.

Effective Date

This guidance was issued on June 30, 2020, and will remain in effect until further notice.

Frequently Asked Questions

OSSE continues to acknowledge that LEAs and schools are operating in a rapidly changing environment, under unprecedented circumstances lasting for unpredictable timeframes. We remain committed to being flexible and accommodating where possible and offer the following additional guidance to provide clarity on questions and concerns OSSE has received from LEAs.

Q1: If schools are operating fully or partially remotely, are LEAs still required to screen new students to determine EL status within 30 days of the first day of school (two weeks if enrolling after the beginning of the year) and use the same screener assessments during distance learning?

A: If possible, the LEA should conduct screening for EL eligibility in person using state-approved English proficiency screeners and make every effort to do so in a timely manner. However, if in-

¹ [2015 U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education Dear Colleague Letter](#); [District Municipal Regulations 5-E3101](#); [DC Language Access Act](#); [Delivering Education Services to English Learners Policies and Procedures for Administrators, Instructional Leaders and Teachers in the District of Columbia](#)

person screening is not possible, the LEA should conduct provisional EL screening. This procedure will be provided by OSSE in July, 2020. This is a temporary, provisional EL identification method that does not replace the requirement to conduct full EL identification using state-approved EL screener assessments once in-person screening is possible. The purpose is to ensure that students who are ELs begin receiving the necessary English language supports and services without delay. When using the provisional EL identification procedure, an LEA may explain to parents orally the information required to be in the parent notification letter to start providing EL services remotely to those students.

The LEA must keep track of all students who are screened using the provisional method and record the results as “Provisional EL” (PEL) or “Provisional Not EL” (PNEL) in the LEA’s student information system (SIS). As soon as it is possible to do so, the LEA should (1) conduct full screening using state-approved screeners for all students with PEL and PNEL status; (2) provide formal parent notification according to state policy and procedures for all students who were screened provisionally;² and (3) record the resulting formal EL status in LEAs’ SIS.

Q2: Are LEAs required to provide language instruction services to ELs during distance learning? If so, what are the expectations?

A: Yes. The LEA must provide language instruction services to ELs during remote, in-person and hybrid settings. Physical school closures or social distancing schedules may affect the way services are provided to ELs. For example, EL services may be provided virtually, online or via telephone. The LEA should develop a plan for when, how, and by whom EL services and supports will be provided. It is recommended that the LEA use multiple data sources to develop English language proficiency goals for each EL student and then determine EL program placement and services to support progress towards those goals. EL, general education, specials/enrichment, and special education teachers, as well as related service providers, school leaders and parents, should collaborate to continue to meet the needs of ELs.

Q3: During distance learning, must the LEA provide ELs content area instruction and provide language accommodations to EL in those classes?

A: Yes. ELs must have full, equitable access to all educational programs. The LEA must provide language accommodations for content classes that are held remotely. Numerous educational technology features may be leveraged as accommodations that provide ELs access to grade-level content. Examples include extended time, graphical supports, and online dictionaries. EL, general education, specials/enrichment, and special education teachers, as well as related service providers, school leaders and parents, should collaborate on effective uses of technology to provide equitable access to grade-level content.

² See pages 7-14 of [Delivering Education Services to English Learners Policies and Procedures for Administrators, Instructional Leaders and Teachers in the District of Columbia](#)

Q4: If a student does not receive an ACCESS score due to suspended testing this spring, can the student exit from EL status?

A: No. The LEA may not exit an EL from EL status without an ACCESS score that meets the minimum exit criteria. For students whose 2019-20 school year ACCESS score met the exit criteria and are now exited from EL status, schools should closely monitor these students to ensure they do not need additional supports. The spring distance learning and summer period may cause some temporary regression in proficiency, thus requiring more language supports and services upon return to school than previously necessary.

Q5: How should LEAs ensure meaningful communication with parents of ELs in a language they can understand?

The LEA must ensure meaningful communication with parents of ELs in a language they can understand and adequately notify parents with limited proficiency in English of information about any program, service, or activity that is also called to the attention of English-proficient parents. Strategies and supports to assist with language access are provided [here](#).

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.