

Advancing Equity for K–12 English Learners

The term “English learners (ELs)” refers to the student population defined in section 8101(20) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. As of the fall of 2021 ELs represent approximately 11% of the total student enrollment in U.S. K–12 public schools.¹ Providing ELs with opportunities to meaningfully participate in all aspects of education is critical in addressing broader equity goals.²

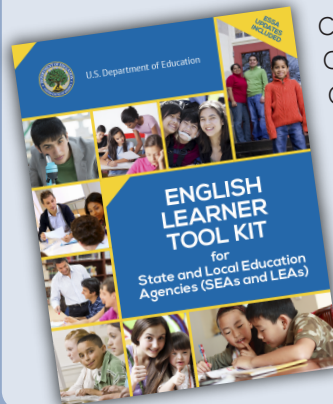


Equity for ELs

When schools work to advance equity for ELs, they recognize the barriers specific to ELs and provide resources and supports necessary for success in school and beyond.

On Jan. 20, 2021, the Biden-Harris administration issued an [Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#) to systematically recognize and address inequities in government policies.


To learn more about equity action steps that local educational agencies (LEAs) and state educational agencies (SEAs) can take, check out the 10 chapters of the [English Learner Toolkit](#):



- Chapter 1 – Identifying all English Learner Students
- Chapter 2 – Providing English Learners with a Language Assistance Program
- Chapter 3 – Staffing and Supporting an English Learner Program
- Chapter 4 – Meaningful Access to Core-Curricular, Extra Curricular Programs
- Chapter 5 – Creating an Inclusive Environment for and Avoiding Unnecessary Segregation of English Learners
- Chapter 6 – Addressing English Learners with Disabilities
- Chapter 7 – Serving English Learners Who Opt Out of EL Programs
- Chapter 8 – Monitoring and Exiting English Learners from EL Programs and Services
- Chapter 9 – Evaluating the Effectiveness of a District’s EL Programs
- Chapter 10 – Ensuring Meaningful Communication with Limited English Proficient Parents

How Can Schools Advance Education Equity for K–12 English Learners?

Ideas from federally funded research studies and other educational publications to identify practices and approaches that may enhance opportunities for LEAs and SEAs to advance equity for ELs

OPPORTUNITY	PRACTICES/APPROACHES	IDEAS IN ACTION
<p>Help ELs Achieve Their Full Academic Potential</p> 	Promote a bias-free and accessible learning environment. ³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide outreach in students’ and families’ home languages. • Create lessons reflecting students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds. • Build relationships with students and families. • Model the language necessary for ELs to access classroom texts and tasks. • Create language-rich learning environments with peer interaction and collaborative problem-solving.
	Use high-challenge and high-support curricula for college and career readiness. ⁴	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create content and language goals for each lesson. • Provide scaffolded support in language and content. • Encourage participation in dual enrollment programs. • Encourage and support enrollment in career and technical education programs. • Encourage and support enrollment in challenging coursework, such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate. • Offer tutoring and online or distance-learning services.
	Recruit, prepare, and retain a racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse and well-prepared educator workforce. ⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider developing Grow Your Own programs and Registered Apprenticeships for educators.⁶ • Apply for a National Professional Development grant.⁷ • Employ the Department’s ABCs: Agency for teachers to make decisions that are right for their students, Better working conditions, and Competitive salaries.⁸

1. Word of the Day



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OPPORTUNITY

PRACTICES/APPROACHES

IDEAS IN ACTION

Help ELs and Their Families Feel Safe and Supported



Implement social emotional learning (SEL) to help ELs manage their thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and relationships.⁹

Support family engagement to cultivate and maintain two-way communication among diverse communities.¹⁰

- Implement culturally and linguistically inclusive approaches to SEL (e.g., recognize and leverage the assets of Indigenous and students of color).
- Maintain consistent routines to promote predictability and safety (e.g., start and end classes the same way).
- Listen to students (e.g., let students voice concerns and uncertainties) and respond in age-appropriate ways.
- Foster community and connection (e.g., provide times for students to share experiences and make connections through collaborative projects).
- Be kind, welcoming, and patient to increase ELs' feelings of safety and self-efficacy.

- Learn about and value the diversity in the communities the school serves.
- Use culturally relevant approaches that empower EL families to be decision-makers.
- Secure and build relationships with translators/ interpreters for languages represented at the school.
- Inform families about supplemental services and how to identify and receive those services.



Help Schools and Teachers Recognize ELs' Cultural and Linguistic Assets



Use instructional programs and techniques to develop ELs' home languages and cultures.¹¹

Employ culturally relevant assessment and identification processes.¹³

- Develop and implement research-based, high-quality dual-language programs.
- Promote translanguaging—the use of fluid language practices within multilingual communities.
- Provide ELs with equitable opportunities to earn awards or certificates at graduation that recognize proficiency in a language other than English.¹²
- Provide instruction and assess students' knowledge in their home language, when possible.
- Engage families to best interpret assessment results, including evaluations for potential identification as a student with a disability under IDEA or section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.
- Consider how strategies for ELs fit into Response to Intervention (RTI) and Multitiered System of Supports (MTSS) frameworks to best support students as part of a whole-school approach.¹⁴



Further Learning

Frameworks that embody principles of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy:

New York State Department of Education. (n.d). *Culturally responsive-sustaining education framework*.
<http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/crs/culturally-responsive-sustaining-education-framework.pdf>

The Center for Education Equity. (2019, June). *Creating new futures for newcomers: Lessons from five schools that serve K-12 immigrants, refugees, and asylees*.
<https://maec.org/newcomers/>

Eliminate educator shortages, including shortages of multilingual educators:

U.S. Department of Education; Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development. (2023, November). *Raise the Bar policy brief: Eliminating educator shortages through increasing educator diversity and addressing high-need shortage areas*. <https://www.ed.gov/raisethebar/Eliminating-Educator-Shortages-through-Increasing-Educator-Diversity>

U.S. Department of Education (n.d). *Raise the Bar: Eliminate the educator shortage*. <https://www.ed.gov/raisethebar/educators>

How schools and districts can improve course access for ELs:

U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. (2021, April). *English learners in secondary schools: Trajectories, transition points, and promising practices* [Webinar]. <https://vimeo.com/540799924/a14380e27d>

Vazquez Cano, M., Umansky, I. M., and Thompson, K. D. (2021). *How state, district, and school levers can improve the course access of students classified as English learners in secondary schools*. WestEd. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED621364>

IB and AP course participation for linguistically diverse students:

Hanson, H., Bisht, B., and Greenberg Motamedi, J. (2016, November). *Advanced course enrollment and performance among English learner students in Washington state* (REL 2017–187). U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Region/northwest/Publication/3796>

Technology considerations for ELs and families:

U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. (2020, June 24). *Engaging English learner communities and families through distance learning* [Webinar]. <https://ncela.ed.gov/events/2020-06-24-webinar-engaging-english-learners-and-families-through-distance-learning>

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service. (2018). *Supporting English learners through technology*. <https://ncela.ed.gov/events/2019-09-26-webinar-supporting-english-learners-els-through-technology>

Identifying gifted and talented ELs:

National Center for Research on Gifted Education. (2016). *Effective practices for identifying and serving English learners in gifted education: A systematic review of the literature*. National Center for Research on Gifted Education, funded by Office of English Language Acquisition. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED602387>

Increasing rigor with appropriate instructional modifications for ELs:

REL Southwest. (2022, March). *Establishing a User Guide for the Promising Practices to Support English Learner Students Resource*. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Region/southwest/Resource/100682>

IDRA Equity Assistance Center-South. (2016). *Three teaching strategies for scaffolding instruction for English learners in the content classroom*. <https://www.idra.org/resource-center/three-teaching-strategies>. Related podcast <https://www.idra.org/resource-center/3-ell-scaffolding-strategies/>

IDRA Equity Assistance Center-South. (2017). *Data to measure an effective instructional context for secondary level newcomers and English learners*. <https://www.idra.org/resource-center/data-measure-effective-instructional-context-secondary-level-newcomers-english-learners/>

REL West. (2016, November). *Long-term English learner students: Spotlight on an overlooked population*. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Region/west/Resource/108034>

Fostering language-rich classrooms for ELs:

REL Southwest. (2015, July). *Professional Learning Communities Facilitator's Guide for the What Works Clearinghouse Practice Guide Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School*. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Region/southwest/Resource/100716>

Baker, S., Lesaux, N., Jayanthi, M., Dimino, J., Proctor, C. P., Morris, J., Gersten, R., Haymond, K., Kieffer, M. J., Linan-Thompson, S., and Newman-Gonchar, R. (2014, April). *Teaching academic content and literacy to English learners in elementary and middle school* (NCEE 2014-4012). National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/WWC/PracticeGuide/19>

SEL practices and how they can help ELs:

- REL Pacific. (2020). *Connecting social and emotional learning, school climate, and student voice* [Infographic]. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Region/pacific/Resource/70112>
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. (2020, October 8). *Culturally responsive school practices to promote the success of Hispanic English learners* [Webinar]. <https://vimeo.com/467375892/3befbc5def>

How schools can engage EL families and incorporate student and family voices:

- Liu, K. K., Funfe Tatak Mentan, C., Lazarus, S. S., Thurlow, M. L., and Jarmin, J. C. (2019). *Working with language interpreters: Information for teachers*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, Improving Instruction for English Learners Through Improved Accessibility Decisions. <https://ici.umn.edu/products/1yngd3o7TWGrqVHNgs7jA>
- Mapp, K. L., and Bergman, E. (2019). *Dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships* (Version 2). <https://www.dualcapacity.org/>
- REL Pacific. (2020). *Including voice in education: Addressing equity through student and family voice in classroom learning* [Infographic]. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Region/pacific/Resource/70111>
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. (2023). *Newcomer toolkit*. <https://ncela.ed.gov/educator-support/toolkits/newcomer-toolkit>
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. (2023). *English learner family toolkit*. <https://ncela.ed.gov/educator-support/toolkits/family-toolkit>
- REL Pacific. (2016, January). *Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and the Community as Partners in Education. Part 1: Building an Understanding of Family and Community Engagement*. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Region/pacific/Publication/3767>

Translanguaging in the classroom:

- REL Pacific. (2020.) *Translanguaging to support students' bilingual and multilingual development* [Infographic]. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Region/pacific/Resource/70107>

Dual language programs in the U.S.:

- Center for Applied Linguistics. (2020). *Guiding principles for dual language education*. <https://www.cal.org/publications/guiding-principles-3/>
- Rutherford-Quach, S., Kelly, H., Torre Gibney, D. and Ballen Riccards, J. (2021). Blog: Examining bilingual education programs and policies. Comprehensive Center Network. Examining Bilingual Education Programs and Policies | Comprehensive Center Network (<https://compcenternetwork.org/>)
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. (2024). *The 3 W's of dual language education for state, local and site leaders: What, why, how* ([Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#)).
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition (2023, August). *Raise the bar: High quality dual language programs for all students* [Webinar]. <https://ncela.ed.gov/events/2023-08-16-webinar-raise-the-bar-high-quality-dual-language-programs-for-all-students>

Developing procedures, guidelines, and protocols for identifying, assessing, and supporting EL students who may have learning disabilities:

- Burr, E., Haas, E., and Ferriere, K. (2015, July). *Identifying and supporting English learner students with learning disabilities: Key issues in the literature and state practice* (REL 2015–086). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory West. <https://ies.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=REL2015086>
- Comprehensive Center Network (2022). Webinar: Multilingual assessment. Multilingual Assessment | Comprehensive Center Network (<https://compcenternetwork.org/>)
- Great Lakes Equity Center. (2019, June). *Disability and English learners: Intersections of civil rights and best practice*. <https://greatlakesequity.org/resource/disability-and-english-learners-intersections-civil-rights-and-best-practice>
- REL Northeast and Islands. (2020). *Identifying English learners with disabilities* [Infographic]. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Region/northeast/Resource/50208>
- REL Southeast. (2021, July). *Identifying and Meeting the Needs of English Learner Students with Disabilities* [Infographic]. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Products/Region/southeast/Resource/80214>
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. (2017). *English learner toolkit*. <https://ncela.ed.gov/educator-support/toolkits/english-learner-toolkit>

Multi-Tiered System of Supports:

- University of Texas at Austin/The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk (2021) *Multitiered system of supports for English learners: Model demonstration research sponsored by the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education*. <https://mtss4els.org/>

- ¹ National Center for Education Statistics (2024). English learners in public schools. *Condition of Education*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgf>.
- ² Under Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* and the *Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974*, public schools must ensure that EL students can participate meaningfully and equally in educational programs. In addition to the civil rights requirements, States have specific obligations to ELs under Titles I and III of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, as do school districts that receive subgrants under one or both of those programs.
- ³ Office of English Language Acquisition and Office for Civil Rights (2023, June 22-23). National convening on English learners' civil rights [Meeting]. <https://ncela.ed.gov/events/2023-06-22-meeting-national-convening-on-english-learners-civil-rights>; Center for the Success of Secondary English Learners (2022, May). Integrating language development throughout content learning. <https://www.cselcenter.org/resources/categories/resources-for-teachers>.
- ⁴ U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition (2023, June). *English learner civil rights brief – Practices to increase access to advanced coursework and specialized programs for students who are English learners*. <https://ncela.ed.gov/resources/brief-english-learner-civil-rights-brief-practices-to-increase-access-to-advanced>; U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition (2022, April). *Career and technical education: Preparing K–12 multilingual learners for postsecondary education and careers*. <https://ncela.ed.gov/resources/infographic-career-and-technical-education-preparing-k-12-multilingual-learners-for>.
- ⁵ Department of Education (November, 2023). *Raise the bar policy brief: Eliminating educator shortages through increasing educator diversity and addressing high-need shortage areas*. <https://www.ed.gov/raisethebar/Eliminating-Educator-Shortages-through-Increasing-Educator-Diversity>; Parker, C., Partika, A., & Rutherford-Quach, S. (2024). *Strengthening the teacher workforce to support multilingual learners: A tool for state educational agencies*. National Comprehensive Center at Westat. <https://compcenternetwork.org/resources/resource/8653/strengthening-teacher-workforce-support-multilingual-learners-tool-state>.
- ⁶ Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition (September, 2020). *EL teacher preparation: Zooming in on Maryland's eastern shore – Part 1*. <https://ncela.ed.gov/resources/podcast-el-teacher-preparation-zooming-in-on-marylands-eastern-shore-part-1-september>.
- ⁷ Department of Education (n.d.) *National Professional Development Program*. <https://ncela.ed.gov/national-professional-development-program>.
- ⁸ Department of Education (November, 2023). *Raise the bar policy brief: Eliminating educator shortages through increasing educator diversity and addressing high-need shortage areas*. <https://www.ed.gov/raisethebar/Eliminating-Educator-Shortages-through-Increasing-Educator-Diversity>.
- ⁹ U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition (2022, April). *Addressing the impact of COVID-19 on multilingual learners and their social and emotional well-being*. Department of Education. <https://ncela.ed.gov/resources/infographic-addressing-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-multilingual-learners-and-their-social>.
- ¹⁰ Office of English Acquisition. (2023, June). *Newcomer toolkit*. U.S. Department of Education. <https://ncela.ed.gov/educator-support/toolkits/newcomer-toolkit>.
- ¹¹ Steele, J. L., Slater R., Zamarro, G., Miller, T., Li, J. J., Burkhauser, S., and Bacon, M. (2017). *Dual-language immersion programs raise student achievement in English*. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9903.html; Great Lakes Equity Center (2022). https://greatlakesequity.org/sites/default/files/20221032974_equity_tool.pdf.
- ¹² Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition (2024, November). *State Seal of Biliteracy*. <https://ncela.ed.gov/resources/infographic-state-seal-of-biliteracy-march-2024>.
- ¹³ Tabaku, L., Carbuccia-Abbott, M., and Saavedra, E. (2018). *State assessments in languages other than English*. Midwest Comprehensive Center. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED590178.pdf>; Department of Education, Office of Program and Grantee Support Services (2022). *Assessing multilingual learners? Easier than you think*. <https://compcenternetwork.org/resources/resource/8074/multilingual-assessment>.
- ¹⁴ Office of English Acquisition (2023, June). *Newcomer toolkit*. U.S. Department of Education. <https://ncela.ed.gov/educator-support/toolkits/newcomer-toolkit>.

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