

## Enrolling Your Child in School

“Enrolling Your Child in School” is the first topic in the English Learner Family Tool Kit. This tool kit is meant to support families of English learners (ELs) in the U.S. education system. Each topic has five parts: (1) Overview, (2) Family and Student Rights, (3) Questions to Ask School Staff, (4) Tips, and (5) Resources. Information varies for each topic, though some information may be repeated.

### Overview

Enrolling your child in school can be a very exciting time. Some things may be familiar, and other things may be unfamiliar to you and your child. All children who live in the United States have the right to equal access to a free public education. States may also have public preschool or pre-kindergarten programs. School staff can provide important information about enrolling your child in school. Please ask them questions. Teachers, principals, guidance counselors, and other staff will work together to help you and to help your child learn and succeed in school.

### Family and Student Rights

**As a family member with school-aged children, you have certain rights.** *This is very important. A parents’ national origin, citizenship, or immigration status does not change this right.* For example:

- Under federal law, all children, regardless of their citizenship or residency status, are entitled to equal access to a free public education.<sup>1</sup>
- Schools and school districts can ask for immunization records and proof of age from a clinic or doctor, as well as proof of residency (for example, a utility bill that reflects your current address). Check the school and district websites to learn about the documents required to enroll your child in school. All students must provide this information.
- Schools cannot ask for documentation that would prohibit or unlawfully discourage a student from enrolling in or attending school.
- Schools are not allowed to share information that may reveal a student’s personal information, unless permitted by law or if you give them written permission.<sup>2</sup>
- Schools must ensure meaningful communication with limited English proficient parents in a language they can understand. They must notify limited English proficient parents of information about any program, service, or activity of a school district that is called to the attention of parents who are proficient in English.
- Schools must identify EL students who need services to learn English. To get started, most schools will ask you to fill out a Home Language Survey. This will help determine if your child needs to be tested to find out if your child is eligible for English language services.
- If the English proficiency assessment determines that your child is eligible for specialized language services, the school must provide these services. You must give permission for your child to receive these services. You also have a choice to not have your child receive such services.

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<sup>1</sup> Students with F-1 or M-1 non-immigrant visas attending private schools are responsible for paying tuition, while F-1 visa holders attending a public secondary school are responsible for paying the full, unsubsidized per capita cost of attending school (see <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/kindergarten-to-grade-12-schools>).

<sup>2</sup> Information about the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)* can be found at [https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/sites/default/files/resource\\_document/file/for-parents.pdf](https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/sites/default/files/resource_document/file/for-parents.pdf).

## **Suggested Questions to Ask School Staff**

The following are sample, optional questions you may ask school staff to help you to enroll your child in school:

1. Who can help me enroll my child in school?
2. Will my child's siblings enroll in this school?
3. What documents must I bring to school or the district office to enroll my child?
4. A minor relative is living with me, and I am not the legal guardian of that child. The child's parents are not living with the child. Can I enroll the child in my local district?
5. Can I get materials translated and an interpreter to help me talk with school staff?
6. What is the deadline for providing the required documents and/or for getting any required vaccinations?
7. What time does school start and end?
8. How does my child get to school? Do I have to pay for transportation services? Where can I find information on bus routes and bus stops, and how can I find out if the bus is delayed?
9. My child needs help learning English. How can I be sure that my child receives services to help him or her learn English?
10. What supplies does my child need for school?
11. Does the school have before- and after-school day care for my child?
12. How can I enroll my child in after-school activities or in an after-care program (for elementary school children)?
13. Is there a public preschool program for my 4-year-old child? If so, how can I obtain information about that program?
14. What information about my child will the school share with people outside of the school?
15. My child will be in high school. How can I get information about graduation requirements?

## **Tips for Families**

- Do not sign any paperwork until you understand the information and agree to what is being asked of you.
- If possible, take a parent or guardian whose child already attends your school with you to enroll your child.
- If possible, visit your school and district websites to see what information is available to help you prepare for enrolling your child.
- Ask for a school calendar and information about when the school opens late and closes early.
- Sometimes families must pay for the child's breakfast or lunch, school supplies, and before- and after-school activities. Ask the school if you must pay for these things or if the school can provide you with financial assistance, if needed.
- Sometimes schools close due to holidays, teacher workdays, bad weather, or other unexpected events. Schools let families know about these events in several ways, such as sending text or email alerts or broadcasting it on the local news or radio stations. Ask how you can expect to receive this critical information.

## RESOURCES

Adult Learning Resource Center. (2012). Enrolling in school. In *A Guide to Your Children's Schools: A Parent Handbook*, pp. 4-6. Des Moines, IL: Illinois State Board of Education.

Retrieved from <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/PGuide-english.pdf>

This is a guide developed by the state of Illinois to help parents learn how to enroll their child in school. There are some items that are specific to the state, like specific documents needed for proof of residence, but some of the information is more general.

iColorín Colorado! (no date). School Registration: ELLs and Immigrant Students. Retrieved from <http://www.colorincolorado.org/school-support/school-registration-ells-and-immigrant-students>.

This web page is a compilation of resources, including video and fact sheets, to help parents of English learner and/or immigrant students register or enroll their children in school.

Education Law Center. (2012). *How to Enroll a Child in Public School*. Philadelphia, PA: Author. Retrieved from [https://www.elc-pa.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/ELC\\_SchoolEnrollmentGuide\\_Aug2012.pdf](https://www.elc-pa.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/ELC_SchoolEnrollmentGuide_Aug2012.pdf)

This is a guide developed by a nonprofit in Pennsylvania to help parents navigate enrollment in school. Some of the information is specific to Pennsylvania, but some of the information is more general.

Refugee Center Online. (2018). "Public School in the USA." Retrieved from

<https://therefugeecenter.org/resources/public-school/>

This web page is meant to help new arrivals navigate the public school system, and includes questions and answers about enrollment.

U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, and U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2014). "Fact Sheet: Information on the Rights of all Children to Enroll in School." Washington, DC: Authors. <https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/crt/legacy/2014/05/08/plylerfact.pdf>

This fact sheet outlines the rights of all children residing in the United States to enroll in school, regardless of citizenship or immigration status.

This document contains examples and resource materials that are provided for the user's convenience. The inclusion of any material is not intended to reflect its importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, or products or services offered. These materials may contain the views and recommendations of various subject matter experts as well as hypertext links, contact addresses and websites to information created and maintained by other public and private organizations. The opinions expressed in any of these materials do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. The U.S. Department of Education does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of any outside information included in these materials. Mentions of specific programs or products in these examples are designed to provide clearer understanding and are not meant as endorsements.