



Practices to Increase Access to Advanced Coursework and Specialized Programs for Students Who Are English Learners

Many school districts offer educational programs and services that are specialized or advanced. All students should have equal access to challenging or specialized courses and programs, including ELs. Yet students who are ELs often face barriers¹ to enrollment (such as course restrictions based on proficiency, lack of EL-content collaboration, and other barriers), in specialized or advanced programs, such as Advanced Placement (AP), gifted and talented education (GATE), honors, International Baccalaureate, career and technical education (CTE), pre-collegiate experiences, career pathways, dual enrollment, dual credit, and concurrent enrollment programs.²

This resource features practices that districts and schools may consider in their efforts to increase access to advanced or specialized programs for students who are ELs. You can read more about students' access to educational opportunities from early childhood to grade 12 in the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights [Annual Report](#) published May 1, 2023.

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) provides national leadership to help ensure that students who are English learners (ELs) attain English proficiency and achieve academic success. OELA is committed to supporting opportunities for biliteracy or multiliteracy skills for all students, including by disseminating information about education research, practices, and policies for students who are ELs.

1

Adopt universal screening processes to identify all qualified students for advanced or specialized programs.

Schools should screen all students for processes for advanced or specialized program placement. For example, a school district could screen all students for GATE using relevant criteria that minimize language-related barriers for students who are ELs in taking any tests that are part of the GATE identification process, including the use of native language alternative aptitude and/or achievement tests or English-language tests with appropriate accommodations. Such

screening tools may help identify if any barriers to the GATE program are due to a student's language proficiency.

Resources:

["English Learners in Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate Courses"](#)
[Exploratory Study on the Identification of English Learners for Gifted and Talented Programs](#)

1. [How State, Districts, and School Levers can Improve the Course Access of Students Classified as English Learners in Secondary Schools](#)
"How Policy Affects Access to Learning for English Learners (cselcenter.org)"
"Cross-Subject-Area Course Requirements & Their Implications for Diploma Options in Texas for ELs (cselcenter.org)"

2. For information about schools' obligations under Federal civil rights laws to students who are ELs in the context of specialized or advanced programming, please see the Office for Civil Rights' fact sheet, Ensuring Meaningful Participation in Advanced Coursework and Specialized Programs for English Learner Students, available at www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/ocr-factsheet-ap-participation-el.pdf and www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/ocr-factsheet-ap-participation-el-sp.pdf.



2

Review prerequisites and course requirements so that selection criteria for advanced coursework towards earning college credits, are directly related to the course or program of study.

For example, a district may assess whether a grade point average (GPA) requirement for enrolling in an advanced level computer science program is necessary. The district may find that students who have extensive experience in coding outside of the classroom could be successful in the course. As a result, the district could consider removing the GPA requirement for the course and replacing it with a requirement that students exhibit a demonstrated interest in the course material.

Resources:

[How State, Districts, and School Levers can Improve the Course Access of Students Classified as English Learners in Secondary Schools](#)

["Tools and Resources for Providing English Learners Equal Access to Curricular and Extracurricular Programs"](#)

["English Learners in Secondary Schools: Trajectories, Transition Points, and Promising Practices"](#)

3

Assess agreements with outside entities for the provision of specialized programs that may improve EL student participation.

In developing agreements with postsecondary institutions for dual enrollment programs, a district may evaluate whether the selection criteria for the program unnecessarily screens out students who are ELs who may benefit from the program, and whether practices and procedures outlined within the agreement create other unnecessary barriers for students who are ELs.

Resources:

[How State, Districts, and School Levers can Improve the Course Access of Students Classified as English Learners in Secondary Schools](#)

["How Policy Affects Access to Learning for English Learners \(cselcenter.org\)"](#)

[Raise The Bar: Unlocking Student Success — Dual Enrollment](#)

[Raise The Bar: Unlocking Student Success — Career Advising and Navigation](#)

[Raise The Bar: Unlocking Student Success — Pathways for Global Engagement](#)



4

Provide support services to students who are ELs in less traditional settings.

In developing agreements with postsecondary institutions for dual enrollment programs, a district may evaluate whether the selection criteria for the program unnecessarily screens out students who are ELs who may benefit from the program, and whether practices and procedures outlined within the agreement create other unnecessary barriers for students who are ELs.

Resources:

- [Raise The Bar: Unlocking Career-Success "ELs in College-Credit Bearing Courses"](#)
- ["Increasing the Reach of Career and Technical Education \(CTE\)"](#)
- ["CTE Infographic: Preparing K-12 Multilingual Learners for Postsecondary Education and Careers"](#)

5

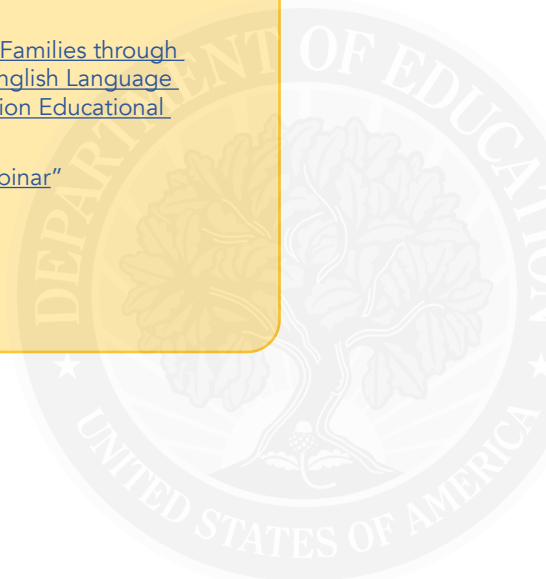
Publicize opportunities for specialized programs to bolster inclusivity.

Schools are responsible for providing meaningful and adequate information to students who are ELs and parents and guardians with limited English proficiency throughout all interactions with school staff and administrators. Successful outreach and recruitment plans for specialized programs often incorporate multiple methods of communication, as well as communications provided in multiple languages. For example, a school district could hold parent/guardian meetings and student assemblies about advanced programs or specialized educational opportunities in multiple languages appropriate to the district's student and parent population. A district might also use other methods, such as social media, text messages, campus newsletters, and the district website, to provide such information in multiple languages reflecting the district's population. In addition to providing

translated materials, the school district could explain how interpretation services may be requested and identify available staff members who may be able to assist in answering questions in languages appropriate to the school district population.

Resources:

- ["Tools and Resources for Ensuring Meaningful Communication with Limited English Proficient Parents"](#)
- ["Engaging English Learners and Families through Distance Learning" | NCELA - English Language Acquisition & Language Instruction Educational Programs"](#)
- [OELA "Family Engagement Webinar"](#)
- [OELA "Family Toolkit"](#)





6

Provide professional development for school personnel about effective practices for inclusion and instruction of students who are ELs in advanced and specialized programs.

Schools can encourage cross-department collaboration at the district, school, and teacher levels (e.g., academic departments, language services for students who are ELs, special education, GATE, counseling) to empower staff to identify students who are ELs who may benefit from advanced or specialized programs. A school district could provide periodic training for all staff members who identify, assist, facilitate, select, counsel, or teach students in advanced programming to provide strategies to remove barriers for participation and provide high-quality instruction to all students, including students who are ELs. Such training could include effective ways for staff members to advertise and promote programs to students and parents, clarify participation requirements (e.g., where appropriate, that English language fluency is not a criterion for GATE participation), share instructions on appropriate district

policies and procedures, and provide examples of effective support services within advanced courses and specialized programs.

Resources:

[Educator Development](#)

[“Developing Educator Expertise to Work with English Learners” | NCELA - English Language Acquisition & Language Instruction Educational Programs](#)

[“Teacher Collaboration: Aligning Content and Language Instruction” | NCELA - English Language Acquisition & Language Instruction Educational Programs](#)

[“Academic Language: Making Space for Student Voices” Webinar \(cselcenter.org\)](#)

[Science Intervention Research: “Teaching for Success” Webinar \(cselcenter.org\)](#)

[“WATCH! Integrating Language Development Throughout Content Learning” \(cselcenter.org\)](#)

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To request documents in alternate formats such as Braille or large print, contact the Department at 202-260-0818 or ofe_eeos@ed.gov.

