U.S. Department of Education

English Learner Family Toolkit

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U.S. Department of Education
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Secretary of Education

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September 2026

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This report is available on the Department's website at https://ncela.ed.gov/educator-support/toolkits/family-toolkit.

Availability of Alternate Formats

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Notice to Limited English Proficient Persons

If you have difficulty understanding English, you may request language assistance services for Department information that is available to the public. These language assistance services are available free of charge. If you need more information about interpretation or translation services, please call 1–800–USA–LEARN (1-800-872-5327) (TTY: 1-800-877-8339), email us at Ed.Language.Assistance@ed.gov, or write to U.S. Department of Education, Information Resource Center, 400 Maryland Ave., SW, Washington, D.C. 20202.

Contents

Introduction **1**

Chapter 1 Enrolling Your Child in School **2**
- Overview 2
- Family and Student Rights 2
- Resources 5

Chapter 2 Attending School in the United States **6**
- Overview 6
- Family and Student Rights 7
- Resources 9

Chapter 3 Other Educational Programs and Services for Your Child **11**
- Overview 11
- Family and Student Rights 11
- Resources 16

Disability-Related Services **19**
- Overview 19
- Resources 20

Chapter 4 Finding Extracurricular Activities for Your Child **22**
- Overview 22
- Family and Student Rights 22
- Resources 25

Chapter 5 The Health and Safety of Your Child at School **27**
- Overview 27
- Family and Student Rights 27
- Resources 32

Chapter 6 Helping Your Child Be Successful in School **35**
- Overview 35
- Family and Student Rights 35
- Resources 39

Chapter 7 Supporting Your English Learner's Literacy Development **41**
- Overview 41
- Stages of Literacy Development 41
- Essential Components of English Learners' Literacy Instruction 43
- The Value of Bilingualism and Biliteracy 44
- Resources 47

Introduction

The mission of the U.S. Department of Education (Department) is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access. In this regard, the Department supports families and community engagement. The mission of the Department's Family and Community Engagement Office[1] states that "[w]hen families, communities and schools work together, students are more successful and the entire community benefits. For schools and districts across the U.S., family engagement is becoming an integral part of education reform efforts." The Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) produced the *Newcomer Toolkit,* and chapter five speaks to families' important role in their child's education.[2] OELA is a principal office within the Department, which, in addition to preserving heritage languages and cultures, is committed to promoting opportunities for biliteracy and/or multiliteracy skills for all students. OELA accomplishes this in the following ways:

- Providing national leadership by informing policy decisions
- Administering discretionary grant programs to prepare professionals for teaching and supporting English learners (ELs)
- Investing in research and evaluation studies that have practical applications for preparing ELs to meet college and career learning standards
- Disseminating information about educational research, practices, and policies for ELs through the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA)

OELA is pleased to provide this *English Learner Family Toolkit* (*Toolkit*) with information on questions families may have about public schools in the United States. The chapters are:

1. Enrolling Your Child in School
2. Attending School in the United States
3. Additional Educational Programs and Services for your Child
4. Finding Extracurricular Activities for Your Child
5. The Health and Safety of Your Child at School
6. Helping Your Child Be Successful in School

Each topic covered in the *English Learner Family Toolkit* is divided into five parts: (1) Overview, (2) Family and Student Rights, (3) Suggested Questions to Ask School Staff, (4) Tips for Families, and (5) Resources. All resources in the *Toolkit* are available online free of charge.

The Department would like to thank all EL family members, students, and school staff who contributed information to the *Toolkit.*[3]

Other than statutory and regulatory requirements included in the document, the contents of this guidance do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies.

[1] https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/resources/family-and-community-engagement

[2] U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. (2023). *Newcomer Toolkit.* Washington, D.C. Newcomer Toolkit (ed.gov)

[3] The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA) supported the development of the *Toolkit*.

Chapter 1
Enrolling Your Child in School

"Enrolling Your Child in School" is the first chapter of the English Learner Family Toolkit, which is designed to support families of English learners (ELs). Each chapter has five parts: (1) Overview, (2) Family and Student Rights, (3) Suggested Questions to Ask School Staff, (4) Tips for Families, and (5) Resources. Information in each chapter varies. As readers can choose to access only certain chapters of the toolkit, it is important to note that some information may be repeated in multiple chapters.

Overview

Enrolling your child in school can be a very exciting time. Some things may be familiar, and other things may be different for you and your child. It is important to note that states may not deny undocumented school-age children the free public education that is provided to children who are citizens of the United States or who are legally admitted residents.[4]

States may have preschool or pre-kindergarten programs at public schools.

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 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*. Your national origin, citizenship, or immigration status does not change these rights. They include the following:

- All school-age children, regardless of their citizenship or immigration status, may access free public school education in the school district where they live.[5]
- Schools and school districts can ask for documentation from multiple sources, which may include immunization records from a clinic or doctor, proof of age, and proof of residency (for example, a utility bill that reflects your current address). Requirements can vary from state to state and district to district. Check the school and district websites to learn about the documents required to enroll your child in school.
- Schools cannot ask for documentation that would prohibit or discourage a student from enrolling in or attending school.[6] For example, schools cannot ask for proof of citizenship status or a parent's social security card.
- In general, schools and school districts cannot share personally identifiable information from a student's education records without the prior written consent of the student's parents unless the

[4] *Plyler v. Doe,* 457 U.S. 202 (1982)

[5] 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).

[6] 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. Retrieved from https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/crt/legacy/2014/05/08/plylerfact.pdf.

student is 18 years of age or older, attends an institution of postsecondary education, or is otherwise permitted by law.[7]

- Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) says that school districts must provide the required communications to parents of ELs under Title I in an understandable format and, when possible, in a language that the parents understand.[8] This means that schools must try to communicate with parents of ELs in their first language, such as in Spanish or Chinese. They must provide information to all parents regardless of their native language or proficiency in English about any program, service, or activity of a school district.[9] Additionally, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires that school districts and state educational agencies (SEAs) ensure meaningful communication with parents with limited English proficiency (LEP) in a language they can understand and adequately notify LEP parents of information about any program, service, or activity of a school district or SEA that is called to the attention of non-LEP parents.[10] The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that consent (agreement or permission) from parents must be requested in the parent's native language or through another form of communication understandable to the parents.[11]
- Schools must identify EL students who need services to learn English. First, most schools will ask you to fill out a Home Language Survey. The results of this survey will help the school decide if your child needs to be tested to determine eligibility for English language services.
- If your child is eligible for specialized language services based on the English proficiency assessment, the school will provide the services. However, you can decline to enroll your child in such services.[12]
- If your child is identified as an English learner, the school must notify you in writing within 30 days of the school year starting. The school should provide information about your child's English language proficiency level, programs, and services available to meet your child's educational needs, and your right to opt your child out of a program or service for English learners.[13]

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[7] The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), 20 U.S.C. § 1232g and 34 CFR part 99, governs education records, and the personally identifiable information contained therein, maintained by educational agencies (for, e.g., school districts) and institutions (i.e., schools). Further information about FERPA can be found at https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/sites/default/files/resource_document/file/for-parents.pdf

[8] ESEA 1112(e)(4).

[9] U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights & U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. *Fact sheet: Information for limited English proficient (LEP) parents and guardians and for schools and school districts that communicate with them.* Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf

[10] U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights & U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. *Fact sheet: Information for limited English proficient (LEP) parents and guardians and for schools and school districts that communicate with them.* Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf

[11] IDEA, 34 CFR 300.9.

[12] ESEA 1112(e)(3).

[13] U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights & U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. *Fact sheet: Information for limited English proficient (LEP) parents and guardians and for schools and school districts that communicate with them.* Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf.

- Students have the right to be free from discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, and disability.[14]

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 brothers and sisters enroll in this school?
3. How old does my child have to be to start preschool or kindergarten in my state?
4. What is the maximum age at which I can enroll my child in high school in my state?
5. What documents must I provide to the school or district office to enroll my child? How can this information be provided to the school, i.e., hard copies, uploaded electronically, sent via email, etc.?
6. What are the deadlines for providing the required documents and getting any required vaccinations?
7. What information, if any, must I provide to a new school for the school to obtain my child's education records from his or her previous school?
8. 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?
9. Can I get materials translated and an interpreter to help me talk with school staff?
10. What time does school start and end?
11. How does my child get to school? Do I have to pay for transportation? Where can I find information on bus routes and bus stops? How can I find out if the bus is late?
12. My child needs help learning English. How can I be sure that my child receives help learning English?
13. What supplies will my child need for school?
14. Can my child receive school meals for free or at a reduced price? What information do I need to provide to qualify for free or reduced-price meals for my child?
15. Does the school have before- and after-school care for my child, and how can I enroll my child in these activities or an aftercare program (for elementary school children)?
16. Is there a preschool program for my four-year-old child? If so, how can I get information about that program?
17. What information about my child will the school share with people outside of the school?
18. My child will be in high school. How can I get information about graduation requirements?

[14] Educational institutions have a responsibility to protect every student's right to learn in a safe environment free from unlawful discrimination and to prevent unjust deprivations of that right. The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces several federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance from the Department of Education. Discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin is prohibited by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (This includes discrimination based on a person's limited English proficiency or English learner status; and actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics, including membership in a religion that may be perceived to exhibit such characteristics (such as Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh individuals)); sex discrimination is prohibited by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; discrimination on the basis of disability is prohibited by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and age discrimination is prohibited by the Age Discrimination Act of 1975. OCR also has responsibilities under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which prohibits disability discrimination by public entities, whether or not they receive federal financial assistance.

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, closes early, and the days on which the school is closed.
- 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 events. Schools let families know about these events in several ways, such as sending text alerts, email alerts, or broadcasting them on the local news or radio stations. Ask how you can receive this 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 children in school. Some items are specific to the state, like specific documents needed for proof of residence, but some of the information is more general.

Education Law Center. (August 2019). *Fact sheet: How to enroll a child in public school*. Philadelphia, PA: Author. Retrieved from How-to-Enroll-A-Child-in-Public-School.pdf (elc-pa.org). This is a guide developed by a nonprofit organization 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. This guide is meant to help new arrivals navigate the public school system and includes questions and answers about enrollment.

U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR). (2015) *Dear Colleague Letter: English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents.* Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf. This Dear Colleague letter reminds states, school districts, and schools of their obligations under federal law to ensure that English learner students have equal access to a high-quality education and the opportunity to achieve their full academic potential. More information about OCR, including how to file a complaint, can be found at https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html. ***This resource is available in numerous languages, including Spanish, Arabic, Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese.***

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. Retrieved from 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.

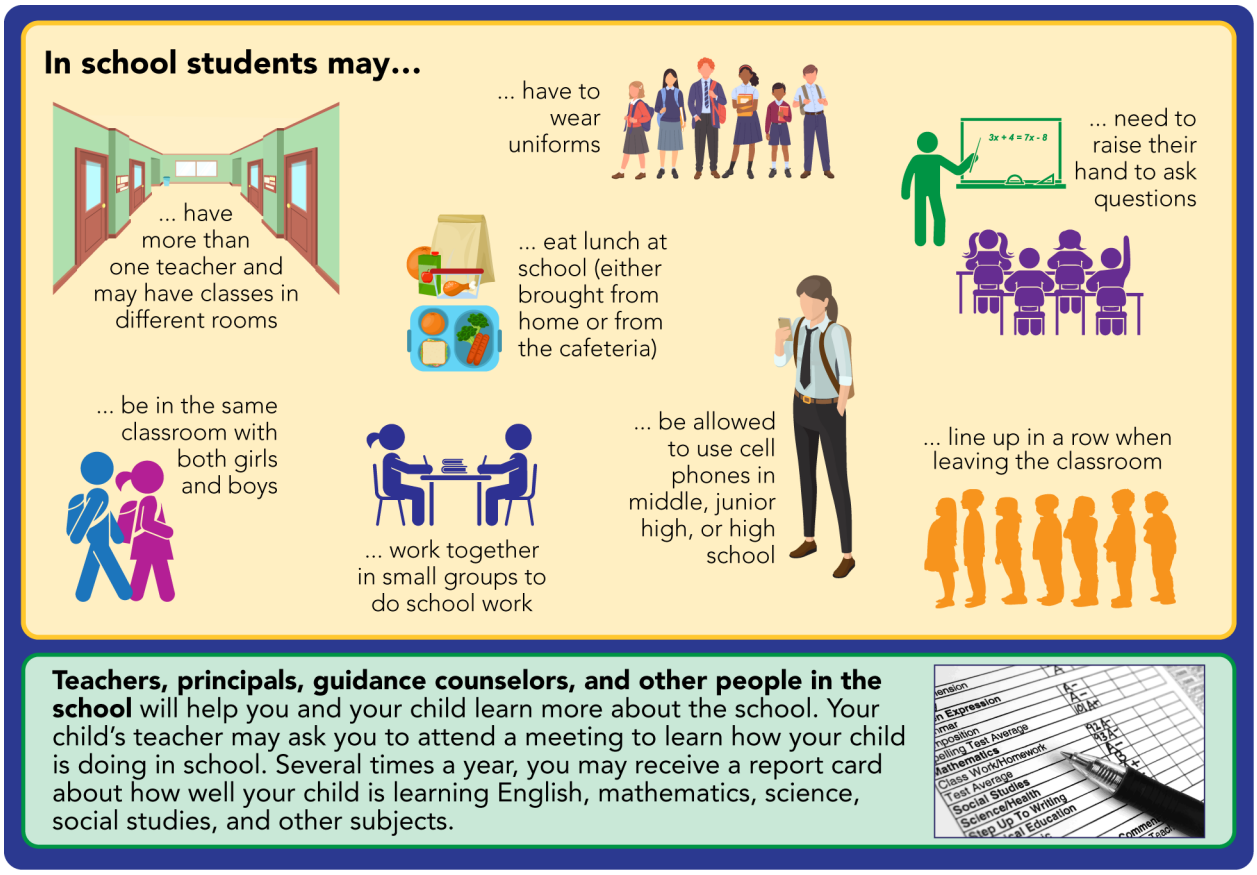
This document contains examples and resource materials that are provided for the user's convenience. The inclusion of any material is not intended to reflect its importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, or products or services offered. These materials may contain the views and recommendations 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 a clearer understanding and are not meant as endorsements.

Chapter 2
Attending School in the United States

"Attending School in the United States" is the second chapter of the English Learner Family Toolkit, which is meant to support families of English learners (ELs) in the U.S. education system. Each chapter has five parts: (1) Overview, (2) Family and Student Rights, (3) Suggested Questions to Ask School Staff, (4) Tips for Families, and (5) Resources. Information in each chapter varies. As readers can choose to access only certain chapters of the toolkit, it is important to note that some information may be repeated in multiple chapters.

Overview

Public schools in the United States (U.S.) may be different from schools in other countries. In this toolkit, you will learn about the structure of schools in the U.S. The grade levels in U.S. schools vary widely across the nation. U.S. public elementary schools usually span from prekindergarten through grades five or six; U.S. middle schools usually include grades six–eight, or seven–eight; U.S. public high schools are generally, but not always, four years, spanning from grades nine–12. Some states may provide education until age 18. Some states also offer preschool or prekindergarten programs at the public school. These programs may be free or require a fee, and they may be partial-day or full-day. Each school has rules that provide a safe environment for students and teachers. The rules may be different for each school so check with your school for more details.



Family and Student Rights

As a family member with school-aged children, you have certain rights. This is very important: Your national origin, citizenship, or immigration status does not change these rights. These rights include the following.

- All school-age children, regardless of their citizenship or immigration status, may access free public school education in the school district where they live.[15]
- Schools cannot ask for documentation that would prohibit or discourage a student from enrolling in or attending school.[16] For example, schools cannot ask for proof of citizenship status or a parent's social security card.
- Schools and school districts may ask for documentation from multiple sources, which may include immunization records from a clinic or doctor, proof of age, and proof of residency (for example, a utility bill that reflects your current address). All students must provide this type of information that the school district requires for enrollment. Requirements can vary from state to state and district to district. Check the school and district websites to learn about the documents required to enroll your child in school.
- In general, schools and school districts cannot share personally identifiable information from a student's education records without the prior written consent of the student's parents unless the student is 18 years of age or older, attends an institution of postsecondary education, or is otherwise permitted by law.[17]
- Schools must identify students who need services to learn English. First, most schools will ask you to fill out a Home Language Survey. The results of this survey will help the school decide if your child needs to be tested to determine eligibility for English language services.[18]
- If your child is identified as an English learner, the school must notify you in writing within 30 days of the school year starting. The school should provide information about your child's English language proficiency level, programs, and services available to meet your child's educational needs, and your right to opt your child out of a program or service for English learners.[19]
- Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) says that school districts must provide the required communications to parents of ELs under Title I in an understandable format and, when possible, in a language that the parents understand.[20] This means that schools must try to communicate with parents of ELs in their first language, such as Spanish or Chinese. They must provide information to all parents, regardless of their native language or proficiency in English, about any program, service,

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[15] Students with F-1 or M-1 non-immigrant visas attending private schools are responsible for paying tuition. 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).

[16] 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. Retrieved from https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/crt/legacy/2014/05/08/plylerfact.pdf.

[17] The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), 20 U.S.C. § 1232g and 34 CFR part 99, governs education records, and the personally identifiable information contained therein, maintained by educational agencies (for, e.g., school districts) and institutions (i.e., schools). Further information about FERPA can be found at: https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/sites/default/files/resource_document/file/for-parents.pdf.

[18] ESEA 1112(e)(3).

[19] U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights & U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. *Fact sheet: Information for limited English proficient (LEP) parents and guardians and for schools and school districts that communicate with them.* Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf.

[20] ESEA 1112(e)(4).

or activity of a school district.[21] Additionally, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires that school districts and SEAs ensure meaningful communication with LEP parents in a language they can understand and to adequately notify LEP parents of information about any program, service, or activity of a school district or SEA that is called to the attention of non-LEP parents.[22] The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that consent (agreement or permission) from parents must be requested in the parent's native language, or through another form of communication understandable to the parents.[23]

- Schools should provide a safe and supportive setting without bullying or harassment.
- Students have the right to be free from discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, and disability.[24]

Suggested Questions to Ask School Staff

The following are sample, optional questions you may ask school staff about attending school.

1. Who do I call to find out which school my child will attend?
2. English is not my first language. Who can interpret for me when I go to the school?
3. How old does my child have to be to start preschool or kindergarten in my state?
4. What is the maximum age at which I can enroll my child in high school in my state?
5. Does the school require a uniform? What if I cannot afford to buy the uniform?
6. Who is my child's guidance counselor and what is this person's contact information?
7. What does my child eat for lunch? When does my child eat lunch? Where does my child eat lunch? What are the rules for lunch? Do I pay for lunch?
8. What is the attendance policy? How should I tell the school if my child will be absent?
9. What will happen if my child must miss school?
10. My child was in ____ grade at their other school. Will my child be in the same grade at this school?
11. What does my child have to do for homework?
12. If there is homework in my child's grade, what help can we receive if my child can't complete the homework?
13. Is there someone in the school who works with families?
14. Does this school have a family-teacher organization and, if so, how do I join?

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[21] U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights & U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. *Fact sheet: Information for limited English proficient (LEP) parents and guardians and for schools and school districts that communicate with them.* Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf.

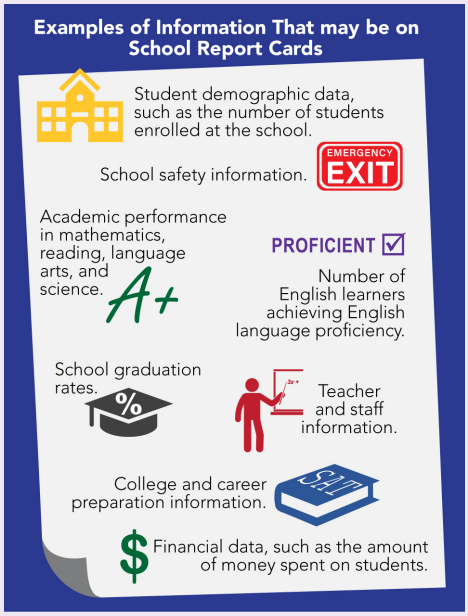
[22] U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights & U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. *Fact sheet Information for limited English proficient (LEP) parents and guardians and for schools and school districts that communicate with them.* Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf.

[23] IDEA, 34 CFR 300.9.

[24] Educational institutions have a responsibility to protect every student's right to learn in a safe environment free from unlawful discrimination and to prevent unjust deprivations of that right. The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces several federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance from the Department of Education. Discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin is prohibited by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (This includes discrimination based on a person's limited English proficiency or English learner status; and actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics, including membership in a religion that may be perceived to exhibit such characteristics (such as Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh individuals)); sex discrimination is prohibited by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; discrimination on the basis of disability is prohibited by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and age discrimination is prohibited by the Age Discrimination Act of 1975. OCR also has responsibilities under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which prohibits disability discrimination by public entities, whether or not they receive federal financial assistance.

Tips for Families

- Do not be shy about asking how you can help or volunteer in your child's school. Helping will give you a chance to learn more about schools in the United States. Some schools may want families to help in the classroom, playground, or cafeteria. Families may volunteer to support sports teams or join the Parent Teacher Association (PTA).
- Before you visit the school, check the school's website. You may find answers to your questions there.
- Most schools have fees for meals, supplies, or uniforms. Ask the school about financial assistance if you cannot afford to pay for these things.
- Schools often send families important information by text messages or email. If you have limited proficiency in English, ask how the school shares important information. For example, does the school use an app, email messages, or voicemail? Be sure that the school has your contact information, such as your phone number and email address.
- Make sure you understand everything. Do not agree to or sign anything until you understand and agree to what is being asked of you.
- Ask for a copy of the school report card. The school report card provides important information about your child's school. This is a good way to learn how well the school is performing. As a family member, you can compare your child's school with other schools in the district. School report cards must be available on the district's website.



Resources

Adult Learning Resource Center. (2012) "Enrolling in School" in *A Guide to Your Children's Schools: A Parent Handbook* (Des Moines, IL: Illinois State Board of Education, 2012), pages 4-6. Retrieved from https://www.isbe.net/Documents/PGuide-english.pdf. This guide was developed by the State of Illinois to help parents learn how to enroll their children in school. Some items are specific to Illinois, like specific documents needed for proof of residence, but some of the information is more general.

Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services (BRYCS), "Educational Handbook for Refugee Parents." Retrieved from https://brycs.org/clearinghouse/2554/. This handbook helps families understand schools in the United States. The handbook is available in Burmese, English, French, Somali, and Spanish.

U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR). (2015) *Dear Colleague Letter: English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents.* Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf. This *Dear Colleague letter* reminds states, school districts, and schools of their obligations under federal law to ensure that English learner students have equal access to a high-quality education and the opportunity to achieve their full academic potential. More information about OCR, including how to file a complaint can be found at https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/complaintprocess.html?src=image. ***This resource is available in numerous languages, including Spanish, Arabic, Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese.***

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 a clearer understanding and are not meant as endorsements.

Chapter 3
Other Educational Programs and Services for Your Child

"Other Educational Programs and Services for Your Child" is the third chapter of the English Learner Family Toolkit, which is meant to support families of English learners (ELs) in the U.S. education system. Each chapter has five parts: (1) Overview, (2) Family and Student Rights, (3) Suggested Questions to Ask School Staff, (4) Tips for Families, and (5) Resources. Information in each chapter varies. As readers can choose to access only certain chapters of the toolkit, it is important to note that some information may be repeated in multiple chapters.

Overview

Schools provide opportunities for students beyond the general education program. These may include

- tutoring for students who need more support;
- advanced classes[25] to challenge students;
- online or distance learning; and
- disability-related services[26] for students with disabilities.

To find out what educational programs and services your child's school offers, ask the school staff. They can help you find what is appropriate for your child. Some services require a fee, and for other services there is no cost. However, not all students are eligible. Ask the staff at your child's school about eligibility for the programs. These educational programs may help your child's learning, help your child explore their interests, and help them succeed academically and in life.

Family and Student Rights

As a family member with school-aged children, you have certain rights. This is very important: A parent's home country, citizenship, or immigration status does not change these rights. These rights include the following.

- Students have the right to be free from discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, and disability.[27]

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[25] For example, the Advanced Placement (AP) Program offers classes with college-level coursework for high school students. Students seeking this academic challenge may choose from their school's offered AP classes, each of which offers an optional, yearly AP exam. Students with a qualifying score on an AP exam might earn credits and/or accelerated placement in college. See https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/about-ap/ap-a-glance. Some schools offer advanced courses through the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, which can also lead to college credits and/or accelerated placement in college. See https://www.ibo.org/. For students in other grade levels, schools may offer specialized coursework for gifted and talented students.

[26] The term "disability-related services" may refer to special education and related services provided to children with disabilities who are eligible for services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and/or regular or special education and related aids and services provided to qualified students with disabilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. See Chapter 3 for more information on disability-related services for EL students with disabilities.

[27] Educational institutions have a responsibility to protect every student's right to learn in a safe environment free from unlawful discrimination and to prevent unjust deprivations of that right. The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces several federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance from the Department of Education. Discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin is prohibited by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (This includes discrimination based on a person's limited English proficiency or English learner status; and actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics, including membership in a religion that may be perceived to exhibit such characteristics (such as Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh individuals)); sex discrimination is prohibited by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; discrimination on the basis of disability is prohibited by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and age discrimination is prohibited by the Age Discrimination Act of 1975. OCR also has responsibilities under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which prohibits disability discrimination by public entities, whether or not they receive federal financial assistance.

- Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) says that school districts must provide the required communication to parents of ELs under Title I in an understandable format and, when possible, in a language that the parents understand.[28] They must provide information to all parents, regardless of their native language or proficiency in English, about any program, service, or activity of a school district.[29] Additionally, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires that school districts and SEAs ensure meaningful communication with LEP parents in a language they can understand and adequately notify LEP parents of information about any program, service, or activity of a school district or SEA that is called to the attention of non-LEP parents. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that consent (agreement or permission) from parents must be requested in the parent's native language, or through another form of communication understandable to the parents.[30] Communication with parents may include information about
  - enrollment and registration;
  - language assistance;
  - grievance procedures;[31]
  - notices of nondiscrimination;[32]
  - student discipline policies and procedures;
  - report cards;
  - requests for parent permission for student participation in district or school activities;
  - parent-teacher conferences;
  - parent handbooks;
  - gifted and talented education (GATE) programs;[33]
  - disability-related services for students with disabilities;[34]
  - magnet and public charter schools;[35]
  - language instruction educational programs;
  - childcare; or
  - extracurricular activities.

- Schools must identify EL students who need services to learn English. First, most schools will ask you to fill out a Home Language Survey. The results of this survey will help the school decide if your child needs to be tested to determine eligibility for English language services.

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[28] ESEA 1112(e)(4).

[29] U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights and U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. *Fact Sheet: Information for limited proficient (LEP) parents and guardians and for schools and school districts that communicate with them.* Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf.

[30] IDEA, 34 CFR 300.9.

[31] A grievance procedure is an internal conflict resolution process that may address formal complaints by individuals. Developing, publicizing, and effectively implementing these procedures gives students and parents opportunities to address concerns at the local level. See https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/grievance.html.

[32] Notices of nondiscrimination require that schools notify students, parents, and others that they do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, and age, and, if applicable, that they provide equal access to the Boy Scouts of America and other designated youth groups. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/nondisc.html.

[33] Gifted education programs provide educational practices, procedures, and approaches for children who have been identified as gifted or talented. The main goals of these programs are generally enrichment and acceleration.

[34] The term "disability-related services" may refer to special education and related services provided to children with disabilities who are eligible for services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and/or regular or special education and related aids and services provided to qualified students with disabilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. See Chapter 3 for more information on disability-related services for EL students with disabilities.

[35] See definitions in Resources section.

- If your child is eligible for specialized language services based on the English proficiency assessment, the school will provide the services. However, you can decline to enroll your child in such services.[36]
- If your child is identified as an EL, the school must notify you in writing within 30 days of the school year starting. The school should provide information about your child's English language proficiency level, programs, and services available to meet your child's educational needs, and your right to opt your child out of a program or service for ELs.[37]
- If you decide to decline language services for your child, their status as an EL will remain. The school will continue to monitor your child's English proficiency and academic progress.
- States must report on the progress of students who exit EL status for four years after the students are no longer identified as ELs.[38]
- If school districts choose to temporarily use a curriculum focused solely on learning the English language, they must measure EL students' progress in core subjects (such as mathematics, science, and reading/language arts) to assess whether students have academic difficulties while learning English. For these students, districts must offer other services to ensure that EL students can catch up in core subject areas within a reasonable time. For example, some newcomer EL programs may at first utilize a curriculum aimed at the very essential English skills and then expand this curriculum to include instruction on core subjects. These services could include tutoring or access to intersession[39] or summer[40] programs.
- EL students must have access to grade-level instruction so that they can advance to the next grade level and meet graduation requirements.
- Schools must give ELs equal access to all school facilities and programs — including computer labs and science labs. This includes prekindergarten, magnet, and career and technical education (CTE) programs, as well as counseling services and online and distance learning opportunities. During remote learning, schools should give ELs hardware (e.g., computers) and software (e.g., programs) necessary to participate in school.
- ELs learning remotely must receive language instruction services from the school. Schools must also continue to provide ELs with language accommodations in their general education courses.
- Schools may not exclude ELs from specialized programs such as Advanced Placement (AP), honors, International Baccalaureate® (IB) courses,[41] and GATE programs.
- Schools must ensure that evaluation and testing procedures for GATE or other specialized courses do not exclude ELs because of their English proficiency levels.

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[36] ESEA 1112(e)(3).

[37] U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights and U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. *Fact sheet: Information for limited English proficient (LEP) parents and guardians and for schools and school districts that communicate with them.* Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf.

[38] Source: Non-Regulatory Guidance: English Learners and Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essatitleiiiguidenglishlearners92016.pdf.

[39] For schools on a year-round calendar, an intersession term is one of the periods throughout the year when the school (or part of the school) is not in session or does not provide annual instruction similar to the traditional school-year regular term. Any break in the regular term of a year-round school is considered an intersession term regardless of the season of the year in which it occurs (ED: 2017, Title I, Part C Education of Migratory Children, Non-Regulatory Guidance, Chapter V, Question D3).

[40] A summer term occurs only in a school that operates under a traditional calendar school year. The summer term is the period of time when the regular term of the school year is not in session (ED: 2017, Title I, Part C Education of Migratory Children, Non-Regulatory Guidance, Chapter V, Question D2).

[41] The International Baccalaureate® (IB) offers a continuum of international education. According to its website, the program encourages both personal and academic achievement, challenging students to excel in their studies and in their personal development. In order to teach IB programs, schools must be authorized. See https://www.ibo.org/programmes/ for more information.

Suggested Questions to Ask School Staff

The following are sample, optional questions you may ask school staff about educational programs and services for your child.

General Questions

1. How is my child doing in school? Is my child's English where it needs to be?
2. Can you explain the program(s) available to help my child learn English? Is there more than one option? If so, how do I enroll my child in a language instruction program, such as an English language learning (ELL) or English as a second language (ESL) program?
3. What can we do at home to help my child learn in "_____" class? Is there homework help available (e.g., a call-in number or website)?
4. Will my child graduate on time with a regular high school diploma? If my child does not meet the requirements to graduate high school with a regular high school diploma, what other certificates, credentials, or alternative diplomas are available?
5. What does my child need to do to be college-ready or skilled in a trade?
6. Is there a trade school training program or other CTE program offered at this school?
7. Can my child enroll in dual-enrollment courses to earn credits towards college or university?

Tutoring

1. My child is having trouble in "_____." How can I get more help for him/her?

Summer or Intersession Programs

1. Does the school offer summer or intersession programs to support my child's progress in classes like reading and math?
2. Is my child eligible to receive financial assistance for summer and/or intersession program fees?

Advanced Classes

1. How does my child get into honors or advanced classes?
2. My child wants to go to college; what classes does he or she need to take to be college-ready?
3. Should my child be in advanced classes at school? (Advanced classes may include honors and AP or IB classes as well as classes for students identified as gifted and talented.)
4. What do I need to do for my child to enroll in these classes?
5. Do these classes cost money? If there are fees for these classes or related exams, are fee waivers or scholarships available?

Online Classes or Distance Learning

1. Are online courses available from the school?
2. How can I enroll my child in such courses?
3. What can these courses do to help my child's educational needs?
4. How does the school make sure the course is accessible to my child if he or she has a disability?
5. Are there places where we can get a free computer, internet access, and/or help with using the necessary technology?

Tips for Families

General Tips

- Talk with your child's teachers to know how your child is doing in school.
- Ask your child's teachers or school staff about what language assistance your child is receiving to help him or her to learn English.
- Many schools have online parent portals that parents can access to learn important information about their child and the school. Ask the school to show you how to access and use the parent portal.
- Schools have different programs for teaching English. Ask the school what programs they offer. Ask how to enroll your child.
- Your child will likely have homework each day. Help them with their homework. Have a set homework place and time. Ask your child to explain their homework to you. Make sure your child completes their homework and turns it in for credit.
- Homework help may be available. Ask your school if such help is available.
- Each student must meet the state's graduation requirements to graduate high school with a regular high school diploma. Each grade has grade-level standards and expectations for students. Understanding these requirements will help your child be successful in school.

Tutoring

- Some schools and organizations offer before- or after-school tutoring. Some of these programs may be free.
- You may also hire a private tutor directly. They charge a fee. Look on the school's bulletin board for notices by private tutors or ask the school staff for recommendations.
- It is important to get help early when your child begins to have trouble with a class.

Summer or Intersession Programs

- Some schools offer summer and/or intersession programs in subjects like reading and math. Ask school staff if, and when, these programs are available.
- Ask the school whether your child is eligible to attend these programs. If there are fees, ask whether financial assistance or reduced rates are available.

Advanced Classes

- Schools may offer gifted, honors, AP, and IB classes. Ask questions to understand the different classes. Ask the school to consider your child for these classes.

Online or Distance Learning

- Ask the school to provide information and instructions for accessing the remote learning website for your school/district.
- Ask if the school provides free or low cost access to computers and/or the internet.
- Ask if the school provides remote learning resources that do not require an internet connection.
- Public libraries may provide free access to computers and/or the internet.[42]
- Fast food restaurants, coffee shops, and other public places may have free internet.
- Ask the school about online courses. Does the school provide access to online content courses, i.e., math, science, and social studies for students? Does the school provide access to online English language courses for students and/or families?

[42] The Federal Communications Commission's (FCC's) Emergency Broadband Benefit Program (EBB Program) is a temporary federal program that launched on May 12, 2021, to help eligible households pay for internet service during the pandemic. For students whose families are struggling to afford their monthly internet service, this program may be able to help. The Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) administers the EBB Program under the direction of the FCC.

Resources

General Resources

GreatSchools has created *Milestones*. GreatSchools describes *Milestones* as follows: "This is a free online collection of videos aimed at helping parents learn grade-level expectations in grades K–12. *Milestones* has students showing what success looks like in reading, writing, and math, grade by grade. High school *Milestones* shows real-world skills students should know as well as the academic ones." https://www.greatschools.org/gk/milestones/ ***This resource is available in English and Spanish.***

KidsHealth has created *10 Ways to Help Your Child Succeed in Elementary School.* https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/school-help-elementary.html ***This resource is available in English and Spanish.***

Math.com "The World of Math Online" offers homework help, practice lessons, tips for choosing a tutor, calculators and tools, and games. http://www.math.com/

National Association for College Admission Counseling has information about what courses are needed for college admission. https://www.nacacnet.org/

The Office of Elementary and Secondary Education provides parent education and other family engagement activities that may help you connect more meaningfully with your child's school. Click here to visit the Families page: https://oese.ed.gov/families/

PBS Parents has information on supporting your child's school success. http://www.pbs.org/parents/education/going-to-school/supporting-your-learner/role-of-parents/. ***This resource is available in English and Spanish.***

There are 13 **Statewide Family Engagement Centers** in the U.S. These centers provide help and training to state educational agencies (SEAs) and local educational agencies (LEAs) in promoting family engagement policies, programs, and activities that lead to student development and academic achievement. Click here to find the center in your state: https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-discretionary-grants-support-services/school-choice-improvement-programs/statewide-family-engagement-centers-program/

TODAY Parenting Guides is a collection of resources with information about almost every aspect of your child's development. Information is divided by grade level and topic. https://www.parenttoolkit.com/

Advanced Classes

College Board is a mission-driven organization that oversees the national AP program. Its Parent Resources page provides guidance and resources that can help families support their children in their post-secondary education journeys. https://parents.collegeboard.org/?navId=aps-parents

Equity in Gifted/Talented Education is a website run by the Texas Education Agency. It provides practical resources and information for identifying and serving linguistically diverse gifted/talented learners. https://www.gtequity.org/

Online or Distance Learning

eLearning has created *Getting the Most Out of Your eLearning Course: 10 Study Tips for Online Learners*. This article shares 10 study tips for online learners that will help them succeed while studying for an online course. https://elearningindustry.com/10-study-tips-for-online-learners-getting-the-most-out-of-your-elearning-course

NCELA: Ensuring Continuity of Learning and Operations is a webpage that includes resources for EL educators, students, and families on various topics related to distance learning. Some of the resources on this

page provide information on culturally responsive practices and native language resources, and they also help EL families support their children during remote learning. https://ncela.ed.gov/ensuring-continuity-of-learning-and-operations. ***Some resources on this page are available in languages other than English.***

Definitions

Bilingual LIEPs provide instruction in English and an EL's first or home language. These programs may include the participation of English proficient students in addition to ELs to develop bilingual skills in both groups of students. Two examples of bilingual LIEPs are:

- **Dual-language education programs**, also known as two-way immersion programs. These programs serve both EL and non-EL students. The goals of dual-language programs are to develop bilingualism and biliteracy in English and a partner language (e.g., Spanish), promote high academic achievement in both languages and develop understanding and appreciation of multiple cultures. There are two types of dual-language programs: two-way and one-way. Two-way programs serve ELs and non-ELs by having both groups in the same classroom for academic instruction in both languages. One-way programs serve predominantly students who share the same language background (e.g., ELs whose first language is Spanish). Dual-language programs generally start at the beginning of elementary school (in either kindergarten or grade one) and continue throughout elementary school, with some programs continuing at the secondary level. Some states may have specific policies or eligibility criteria regarding EL placement into dual-language programs.[43]
- **Transitional bilingual education (TBE) programs**, also known as early exit bilingual education, use an EL's first or home language for instruction. These programs maintain and develop skills in the first or main language and culture while introducing, maintaining, and developing skills in English. The primary purpose of a TBE program is to help the EL transition to an English-only instructional program while receiving academic subject instruction in the student's first or home language.[44]

ESL LIEPs provide instruction in English with classroom materials and teaching adapted to the learning needs of ELs. ESL LIEPs may include both language and content instruction or just language instruction.[45]
Two examples of ESL LIEPs are:

- **Content-based ESL programs**[46] provide language instruction using academic content like science and social studies. Students in these programs may also have a separate ESL class during their school day or may receive pull-out ESL instruction where they work with an educator for short periods during other classes. The goals of these programs are both the development of English language skills and preparation for students to meet academic achievement standards.
- **Sheltered English immersion programs**[47] provide instruction that introduces both language and content at the same time by using teaching techniques adapted to ELs' language needs. The focus is on teaching academic content rather than the English language itself, even though English learning may be one of the instructional goals.

A **language instruction educational program (LIEP)** is defined in the *ESEA*, for purposes of Title III of the *ESEA*, as "an instruction course in which an [EL] is placed for the purpose of developing and attaining English proficiency while meeting challenging state academic standards and that may make instructional use of both

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[43] U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition. (2015). *Dual language education programs: Current state policies and practices*.

[44] U.S. Department of Education. (2012). *Language instruction educational programs (LIEPs): A review of the foundational literature*. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/title-iii/language-instruction-ed-programs-report.pdf.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

English and a child's native language to enable the child to develop and attain English proficiency, and may include the participation of English proficient children if such a course is designed to enable all participating children to become proficient in English and a second language." (ESEA section 3201(7)). LIEPs can be divided into two types — bilingual programs and ESL programs — with various models that fit into each category. Program models may differ according to how states define them; public school district websites may have information regarding LIEPs posted on them. Within any LIEP, ELs may make progress in English with teaching that is adapted to meet the student's learning needs. The following examples of LIEPs are not a complete list but provide descriptions of the types of programs that your child's school district may offer.

A **magnet school** is defined in the ESEA for purposes of the federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program as "a public elementary school, public secondary school, public elementary education center, or public secondary education center that offers a special curriculum capable of attracting substantial numbers of students of different racial backgrounds." Magnet schools may offer special instruction in academic content like science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), or different languages. Magnet schools do not charge tuition to families, though they may have a separate admissions process. Magnet schools must comply with local, state, and federal laws.

A **public charter school** is a publicly funded school that is typically governed by a group or organization under a legislative contract (or charter) with the state, district, or other entity. It provides an elementary or secondary education program or both. Charter schools are free from some state or local rules and regulations, but they do need to meet the accountability standards outlined in their charters. A school's charter is reviewed periodically by the entity that granted it and can be taken away if guidelines on curriculum and management are not followed, or if the accountability standards are not met.[48]

Public charter schools vary according to a state's charter school laws, so characteristics, such as the curriculum they use or the programs they offer, may differ from state to state. However, there are some common characteristics of charter schools. Among these, families choose to apply to have a child attend a charter school and attendance is free. Public charter schools also differ from traditional public schools because they can use innovative educational practices. Charter schools may offer in-person, online, and hybrid classes.

A charter school that receives federal money must comply with all applicable federal requirements. The U.S. Department of Education's **Office of Elementary and Secondary Education** operates the **Expanding Opportunity Through Quality Charter Schools Program (CSP)**, which provides money to support the creation of new charter schools and the replication and expansion of existing, high-quality charter schools. A charter school receiving CSP money must meet the definition of a charter school in section 4310(2) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). See https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-formula-grants/school-support-and-accountability/essa-legislation-table-contents/title-iv-21st-century-schools/#sec4310 for more information.

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[48] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). *The condition of education 2021: Public charter school enrollment* (2009–2018). Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgb.asp.

Disability-Related Services

Overview

Some children are identified both as ELs and as having a disability. Under Part B of the IDEA, states and school districts must ensure that all EL students who may have a disability, regardless of the severity of the disability, are located, identified, and evaluated promptly. The evaluation determines whether the child needs special education and related services. If your child is eligible for special education and related services under IDEA, your child's school district must ensure that a written plan called an individualized education program (IEP) is developed by the IEP team (which includes, among others, the child's parents, and school officials). Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, schools must conduct an evaluation promptly of any student who needs or is believed to need special education or related services because of a disability.[49] If a student is eligible for services under Section 504, schools often document the elements of an individual student's services under Section 504 in a document, typically referred to as a Section 504 Plan.

Family and Student Rights

- Schools must provide EL students who have disabilities with both the language assistance and disability-related services to which they are entitled under federal law.
- IDEA requires that if a student is identified as an EL and as a student with a disability, the school must offer language assistance and disability-related services to the student at the same time.
- Disability evaluations may not be delayed because of a student's limited English proficiency. If the school suspects an EL has a disability, the school must evaluate the student quickly to determine whether the child is eligible for special education and related services under IDEA or regular or special education and related aids and services under Section 504.
- A student's limited English proficiency cannot be the reason for determining that a student has a disability.
- In conducting evaluations under IDEA or Section 504, schools must consider the English proficiency of ELs and determine appropriate assessments or other evaluation materials to be used.
- Under IDEA, schools must provide and administer assessments in the child's native language or another mode of communication and in the form most likely to yield accurate information on what the child knows and can do academically, developmentally, and functionally, unless it is not feasible to do so.
- Before your school can evaluate your child, IDEA requires that the school obtain the parent's written consent (agreement or permission).
- The IEP team must consider, among other special factors, the language needs of an EL student with a disability as those needs relate to the child's IEP. Therefore, the IEP team must include participants who have the requisite knowledge of the child's language needs. To ensure that EL children with disabilities receive services that meet their language and special education needs, members of the IEP team must include professionals with training, and preferably expertise, in second language acquisition and an understanding of how to differentiate between the student's limited English proficiency and the student's disability.

[49] 34 C.F.R. § 104.35(a). EL students who may have a disability, like all other students who may have a disability and may require special education or related aids and services under Section 504 because of that disability, must be located, identified, and evaluated in a timely manner. 34 C.F.R. §§ 104.32 and 104.35(a)-(b). To avoid inappropriately identifying EL students as students with disabilities because of their limited English proficiency, an EL student must be evaluated in an appropriate language based on the student's needs and language skills. For additional information, see OCR and DOJ, *Dear Colleague Letter: English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents* (Jan. 7, 2015), www.ed.gov/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf.

Suggested Questions to Ask School Staff

The following are sample, optional questions you may ask school staff about services for your child.

1. I was told that the school thinks my child needs special education services. Who can explain this to me?
2. I think my child needs special education services. How can my child be evaluated to determine if he or she has a disability?
3. How will my child receive services to meet his or her needs that also support his or her English language learning?
4. How will you make sure that my child gets the support they need in English language classes and core academic subjects?

Tips for Families

- With your written permission (consent), your school will evaluate your child to determine if they have a disability (such as a learning disability, a speech disability, or a vision or hearing disability) and need special education and related services because of that disability.
- If your child is found to be eligible for services under IDEA, you must give your written permission before your child can receive special education and related services for the first time. Once you give permission, your child's school district must ensure that a written plan called an individualized education program (IEP) is developed by the IEP team (which includes, among others, the child's parents, and school officials).
- The IEP is developed at an IEP team meeting that you must (under IDEA section 614(d)(1)(B)(i) and 34 C.F.R. § 300.322) be invited to attend along with certain school staff. The school must ensure that you understand what happens at the IEP team meeting, including arranging for an interpreter for you if you are not proficient in English or are deaf or hard of hearing.
- If your child is a student with a disability and is served under Section 504 and not IDEA, your school will typically develop a written Section 504 plan that explains the services your child should receive.
- Each state has a parent training and information center that helps parents of students with disabilities. See the website under Resources for more information.

Resources

There are nearly 100 **Parent Training and Information Centers** and Community Parent Resource Centers in the U.S. and territories.

These centers perform a variety of services for children and youth with disabilities as well as their families, professionals, and other organizations that support them. These services include:

- working with families of infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities, from birth to age 26;
- helping parents participate in their child's education and development; and
- partnering with professionals and policymakers to improve outcomes for all children with disabilities.

Find the center in your area at the Center for Parent Information & Resources.

The National Parent Teacher Association® (PTA) includes millions of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business and community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and the promotion of family engagement in schools. Its website provides the Special Education Toolkit to educate families of children newly diagnosed with special needs on how to get the best services and resources available.

The goal of **Understood.org** is to help the millions of parents whose children, ages 3 through 20, are struggling with learning. They have many resources for families of students with learning issues. https://www.understood.org/. ***This resource is available in English and Spanish.***

The **U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights** website provides more information about federal civil rights laws. https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/know.html?src=ft. ***This resource is available in numerous languages, including Spanish, Korean, Arabic, Chinese, and Vietnamese.***

U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR). (2015). *Dear Colleague Letter: English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents.* Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf. This *Dear Colleague letter* reminds states, school districts, and schools of their obligations under federal law to ensure that English learner students have equal access to a high-quality education and the opportunity to achieve their full academic potential. More information about OCR, including how to file a complaint can be found at https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html. ***This resource is available in numerous languages, including Spanish, Korean, Arabic, Chinese, and Vietnamese.***

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 a clearer understanding and are not meant as endorsements.

Chapter 4
Finding Extracurricular Activities for Your Child

"Finding Extracurricular Activities for Your Child" is the fourth chapter of the English Learner Family Toolkit, which is meant to support families of English learners (ELs) in the U.S. education system. Each chapter has five parts: (1) Overview, (2) Family and Student Rights, (3) Suggested Questions to Ask School Staff, (4) Tips for Families, and (5) Resources. Information in each chapter varies. As readers can choose to access only certain chapters of the toolkit, it is important to note that some information may be repeated in multiple chapters.

Overview

Schools may have before- or after-school programs for your child. Two types of programs are (1) childcare and (2) extracurricular activities. If your child needs a safe place to stay before or after school, ask school staff about childcare. There may be a fee for childcare programs. Schools may also offer extracurricular activities for students, such as sports, art, and music. Student clubs, such as a science or chess club, may be offered as well. Extracurricular activities can help your child make friends and learn new skills. Ask the staff at your child's school about these programs and encourage your child to join.

Family and Student Rights

As a family member with school-aged children, you have certain rights. This is very important. A parent's home country, citizenship, or immigration status does not change these rights. These include the following.

- Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) says that school districts must provide the required communication to parents of ELs under Title I in an understandable format and, when possible, in a language that the parents understand.[50] They must provide information to all parents, regardless of their native language or proficiency in English, about any program, service, or activity of a school district.[51] Additionally, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires that school districts and SEAs ensure meaningful communication with LEP parents in a language they can understand and adequately notify LEP parents of information about any program, service, or activity of a school district or SEA that is called to the attention of non-LEP parents. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that consent (agreement or permission) from parents must be requested in the parent's native language, or through another form of communication understandable to the parents.[52] Communication with parents may include information about
  - enrollment and registration;
  - information about language assistance;
  - grievance procedures;[53]
  - notices of nondiscrimination;[54]

[50] ESEA 1112(e)(4).

[51] U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights and U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. *Fact Sheet: Information for limited proficient (LEP) parents and guardians and for schools and school districts that communicate with them.* Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf.

[52] IDEA, 34 CFR 300.9.

[53] A grievance procedure is an internal conflict resolution process that may address formal complaints by individuals. Developing, publicizing, and effectively implementing these procedures gives students and parents opportunities to address concerns at the local level. See https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/grievance.html.

[54] The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces several federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance from the Department of Education. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/frontpage/pro-students/protectingstudents.html.

  - student discipline policies and procedures;
  - report cards;
  - requests for parent permission for student participation in district or school activities;
  - parent-teacher conferences;
  - parent handbooks;
  - gifted and talented education (GATE) programs;[55]
  - disability-related services for students with disabilities;[56]
  - magnet and public charter schools;[57]
  - language instruction educational programs;
  - childcare; or
  - extracurricular activities.

- Schools must give equal opportunities for EL students, including ELs with disabilities, to participate in school-based programs and activities offered before, during, and after school. This includes equal access to all school facilities and programs, like performing and visual arts programs, sports, clubs, and honor societies. Schools must ensure that each student with a disability has the supplementary aids and services determined by the student's IEP team to be appropriate and necessary for the student to participate in nonacademic and extracurricular settings.
- Students have the right to be free from discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, and disability.[58]

[55] Gifted education programs provide educational practices, procedures, and approaches for children who have been identified as gifted or talented. The main goals of these programs are generally enrichment and acceleration.

[56] The term "disability-related services" may refer to special education and related services provided to children with disabilities who are eligible for services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and/or regular or special education and related aids and services provided to qualified students with disabilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. See Chapter 3 for more information on disability-related services for EL students with disabilities.

[57] See definitions in Resources section.

[58] Educational institutions have a responsibility to protect every student's right to learn in a safe environment free from unlawful discrimination and to prevent unjust deprivations of that right. The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces several federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance from the Department of Education. Discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin is prohibited by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (This includes discrimination based on a person's limited English proficiency or English learner status; and actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics, including membership in a religion that may be perceived to exhibit such characteristics (such as Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh individuals)); sex discrimination is prohibited by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; discrimination on the basis of disability is prohibited by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and age discrimination is prohibited by the Age Discrimination Act of 1975. OCR also has responsibilities under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which prohibits disability discrimination by public entities, whether or not they receive federal financial assistance.

Suggested Questions to Ask School Staff

The following are sample, optional questions you may ask school staff about extracurricular activities for your child.

Extracurricular Activities

1. Are there any school clubs that will help improve my child's English and help my child make friends?
2. Are there places my child can go for safe and healthy after-school activities? (Community center? Library? Faith-based programs/activities?) Is there a fee? If yes, can I get help if I can't pay the fee?
3. What sports/art/music/theater programs are offered at the school or in the community? Is there a fee (for example, uniform, instrument rental, etc.)? If yes, can I get help if I can't pay the fee?
4. Is transportation available? Is there a fee? If yes, can I get help if I can't pay the fee?

Additional Support for Families Outside of School Settings

1. What free resources are available to help my child with homework and learning English?
2. Where in the community can I find translation and interpretation services?
3. Where in the community can I find help for my child's health, social, and/or emotional issues?
4. Does the community have programs to improve job skills, such as computer skills, for me and my high school student?
5. Are there any places where my child and I can take classes together to improve our English?

Childcare

1. Is childcare available before or after school? Is there a fee? If yes, can I get help if I can't pay the fee?
2. How do I sign up? How do I apply for financial help?
3. What will my child do before or after school? Do the children work on homework? Do childcare providers offer tutoring, or provide fun and games?
4. Is childcare provided by teachers or people from an outside company?

Tips for Families

- Ask other parents what clubs and activities their children like.
- Some schools have before- and after-school programs. Programs may be free.
- Many middle and high schools have clubs, music, art, and sports programs.
- Try to find a program that matches your child's interests.
- Childcare resource and referral agencies (see the website listed in resources) can help you find programs to pay for childcare.

Resources

21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) provides academic enrichment opportunities during non-school hours for children, particularly students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools. Check your school district or state Department of Education website to determine whether there is a 21st CCLC program in your community. https://www2.ed.gov/programs/21stcclc/index.html

Boys & Girls Clubs of America offers many local programs that support the needs of all young people. Find your local club by entering your location in this search engine: https://www.bgca.org/programs/all-programs

Child Care Aware of America has many resources to learn about childcare in the U.S. http://www.childcareaware.org/about/. ***This resource is available in English and Spanish.***

There are over 400 local **Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R)** agencies in the U.S. Your local CCR&R can help you find childcare near your home or work. Search for your CCR&R here: http://childcareaware.org/ccrr-search-form/. The website also includes information on programs that can help pay for childcare here: https://www.childcareaware.org/help-paying-child-care-federal-and-state-child-care-programs/. ***This resource is available in English and Spanish***.

U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR). (2015) *Dear Colleague Letter: English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents.* Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf. This Dear Colleague letter reminds states, school districts, and schools of their obligations under federal law to ensure that English learner students have equal access to a high-quality education and the opportunity to achieve their full academic potential. ***This resource is available in numerous languages, including Spanish, Korean, Arabic, Chinese, and Vietnamese.*** More information about OCR, including how to file a complaint can be found at https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html.

Many **YMCAs** offer out-of-school-time programs. Find your local YMCA by entering your location in this search engine: http://www.ymca.net/about-us.

Definitions

A magnet school is defined in the ESEA, for purposes of the federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program, as "a public elementary school, public secondary school, public elementary education center, or public secondary education center that offers a special curriculum capable of attracting substantial numbers of students of different racial backgrounds." Magnet schools may offer special instruction in academic content like science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) or different languages. Magnet schools do not charge tuition to families, though they may have a separate admissions process. Magnet schools must comply with local, state, and federal laws.

A ***public charter school*** is a publicly funded school that is typically governed by a group or organization under a legislative contract (or charter) with the state, district, or other entity. It provides an elementary or secondary education program or both. Charter schools are free from some state or local rules and regulations, but they do need to meet the accountability standards outlined in their charters. A school's charter is reviewed periodically by the entity that granted it and can be taken away if guidelines on curriculum and management are not followed or if the accountability standards are not met.[59] Public charter schools vary according to a state's charter school laws so characteristics such as the curriculum they use or the programs they offer may differ from state to state. However, there are some common characteristics of charter schools. Among these, families choose to apply to have a child attend a charter school and attendance is free. Public charter schools also differ

[59] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). *The condition of education 2021: Public charter school enrollment* (2009–2018). Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgb.asp.

from traditional public schools because they can use innovative educational practices. Charter schools may offer in-person, online, and hybrid classes.

A charter school that receives federal money must comply with all applicable federal requirements. The U.S. Department of Education's **Office of Elementary and Secondary Education operates the Expanding Opportunity Through Quality Charter Schools Program (CSP)**, which provides money to support the creation of new charter schools and the replication and expansion of existing, high-quality charter schools. A charter school receiving CSP money must meet the definition of a charter school in section 4310(2) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). See https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-formula-grants/school-support-and-accountability/essa-legislation-table-contents/title-iv-21st-century-schools/#sec4310 for more information.

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Chapter 5
The Health and Safety of Your Child at School

"The Health and Safety of Your Child at School" is the fifth chapter of the English Learner Family Toolkit, which is meant to support families of English learners (ELs) in the U.S. education system. Each chapter has five parts: (1) Overview, (2) Family and Student Rights, (3) Suggested Questions to Ask School Staff, (4) Tips for Families, and (5) Resources. Information in each chapter varies. As readers can choose to access only certain chapters of the toolkit, it is important to note that some information may be repeated in multiple chapters.

Overview

It may be difficult for children to learn when they are hungry, sick, or scared. Schools not only teach your children, but they also ensure children are healthy and safe.

Your child deserves to feel safe at home and at school. Your child's school may have rules about bullying[60] and procedures for what to do in an emergency (such as a fire, an earthquake, a tornado, or an active shooter). Many schools also have school bus cameras or monitors to keep your child safe. If your child feels unsafe on the bus or in school, speak to school staff about the problem.

A healthy diet is important for your child. Schools may serve healthy meals to students, and some schools have a menu of what will be served. Tell your child's teacher or school staff if he or she has food allergies or special nutritional needs, as your child may have protections under disability law.[61] Tell the school if your child needs to fast or eat different foods for religious holidays. If you cannot afford school meals for your child, let the school staff know. Your child may be eligible for reduced-price or free meals.

There may be days when your child is sick and cannot go to school. School staff usually ask families to inform them when a child is sick and needs to miss school. Ask school staff whom to contact when your child is sick. Some schools may have a school nurse or a school health-care aide who can give medications if your child needs them during the school day and help you find health clinics if your child needs medical care.

Family and Student Rights

As a family member with school-aged children, you have certain rights. *This is very important.* A parent's home country, citizenship, or immigration status does not change these rights. These rights include the following:

[60] Bullying is described by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as a repeated, aggressive action from a student(s) with power to a student(s) with less power. Physical harm, threats, verbal abuse, or exclusion from a group are all examples of bullying. Bullying can happen in school, on the playground, on the bus, in your neighborhood, or online (called cyberbullying). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services gives tips, warning signs, and resources here: https://www.stopbullying.gov/what-is-bullying/index.html.

[61] For example, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504) is a federal civil rights law that prohibits disability discrimination by recipients of federal financial assistance, such as public schools and school districts. For more information, visit https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/disabilityoverview.html.

- Students have the right to be free from discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, and disability.[62]
- Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) says that school districts must provide the required communications to parents of ELs under Title I in an understandable format and, when possible, in a language that the parents understand. [63] They must provide information to all parents regardless of their native language or proficiency in English, about any program, service, or activity of a school district.[64] Additionally, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires that school districts and SEAs ensure meaningful communication with LEP parents in a language they can understand and adequately notify LEP parents of information about any program, service, or activity of a school district or SEA that is called to the attention of non-LEP parents.[65] *The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* requires that consent (agreement or permission) from parents must be requested in the parent's native language or through another form of communication understandable to the parents.[66] Communication with parents may include information about
  - enrollment and registration;
  - language assistance;
  - grievance procedures;[67]
  - notices of nondiscrimination;[68]
  - student discipline policies and procedures;
  - report cards;
  - requests for parent permission for student participation in district or school activities;
  - parent-teacher conferences;
  - parent handbooks;
  - gifted and talented education programs (GATE);[69]

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[62] Educational institutions have a responsibility to protect every student's right to learn in a safe environment free from unlawful discrimination and to prevent unjust deprivations of that right. The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces several federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance from the Department of Education. Discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin is prohibited by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (This includes discrimination based on a person's limited English proficiency or English learner status; and actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics, including membership in a religion that may be perceived to exhibit such characteristics (such as Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh individuals)); sex discrimination is prohibited by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; discrimination on the basis of disability is prohibited by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and age discrimination is prohibited by the Age Discrimination Act of 1975. OCR also has responsibilities under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which prohibits disability discrimination by public entities, whether or not they receive federal financial assistance.

[63] ESEA 1112(e)(4).

[64] U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights &U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. *Fact Sheet: Information for limited English proficient (LEP) parents and guardians and for schools and school districts that communicate with them.* Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf.

[65] U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights & U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. *Fact Sheet: Information for limited English proficient (LEP) parents and guardians and for schools and school districts that communicate with them.* Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf.

[66] IDEA, 34 CFR 300.9.

[67] A grievance procedure is a way for people to have their formal complaints addressed. Developing, publicizing, and effectively implementing these procedures gives students and parents opportunities to address concerns at the local level. (See https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/grievance.html).

[68] Notices of nondiscrimination require that schools notify students, parents, and others that they do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, and age, and, if applicable, that they provide equal access to the Boy Scouts of America and other designated youth groups. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/nondisc.html.

[69] Gifted education programs provide educational practices, procedures, and approaches for children who have been identified as gifted or talented. The main goals of these programs are generally enrichment and acceleration.

  - disability-related services[70] for students with disabilities;
  - magnet and charter schools;[71]
  - language instruction educational programs;
  - childcare; or
  - extracurricular activities.

- All school-age children, regardless of their citizenship or immigration status, may access free public school education in the school district where they live.[72]
- Schools must provide a safe learning environment free from discrimination. Students should be able to learn in an environment free of bullying, discrimination, harassment, or violence.
- Students should be able to feel safe at school. No one can bully or threaten your child. For example, students or teachers cannot injure your child or destroy his or her property, harass your child, or create a hostile environment for your child based on reasons such as
  - wearing ethnic or religious clothes;
  - being from another country;
  - not being proficient in English;
  - having a disability; or
  - their sex.
- Under the U.S. Constitution, students may exercise their First Amendment right to express their religious beliefs. This includes wearing religious clothing and symbols (like a headscarf, crucifix, or yarmulke).
- In public elementary and secondary schools,[73] the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 C.F.R. part 99) gives parents the right to review (i.e., access) the education records74 of their children who are under the age of 18 years and do not attend college or university. The rights accorded under FERPA transfer from parents to a student when the student turns 18 or attends college or university. If your child's school is subject to FERPA, the school must let you review any education records on your child that the school maintains. This could be your child's class schedule and transcript (a complete record of the student's academic achievements).
- In public elementary and secondary schools, FERPA gives parents some control over the disclosure (e.g., for the release or transfer) of personally identifiable information (PII) from their child's education records. PII is information that can be used to determine someone's identity either directly or indirectly.[75] In general, FERPA does not allow educational agencies and institutions to release PII from

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[70] The term "disability-related services" may refer to special education and related services provided to children with disabilities who are eligible for services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and/or regular or special education and related aids and services provided to qualified students with disabilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. See Chapter 3 for more information on disability-related services for EL students with disabilities.

[71] See definitions in Resources.

[72] Students with F-1 or M-1 non-immigrant visas attending private schools are responsible for paying tuition, 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).

[73] Private elementary and secondary schools generally do not receive funds from the Department. Therefore, they are not subject to FERPA.

[74] "Education records" are, with certain exceptions, records that are directly related to a student and maintained by an educational agency or institution, or by a party acting for an educational agency or institution.

[75] This includes, but is not limited to, a student's name; the names of a student's parents or other family members; the address of a student or a student's family; and a personal identifier, such as a student's Social Security number, student number, or biometric record (for example, fingerprints). This also includes other indirect identifiers, such as a student's date of birth, place of birth, and mother's maiden name. It also includes information that, alone or in combination, is linked or linkable to a student and would allow a reasonable person in the school community, who does not have personal knowledge of the relevant circumstances, to identify the student with reasonable certainty.

your child's education records to people or groups outside of the educational agency or institution[76] without your written permission, unless an exception to FERPA's general consent requirement applies. Exceptions to FERPA's general consent requirement can be found in 20 U.S.C. §§ 1232g(b)(1), (b)(2), (b)(3), (b)(5), (b)(6), (h), (i), and (j), and 34 CFR § 99.31.

- IDEA also has confidentiality requirements that protect personally identifiable data, information, and records of children with disabilities (20 U.S.C. §1417(c) and 34 C.F.R. §§300.610–300.626). IDEA requires parental permission to share PII from the education records of children with disabilities unless an exception applies. The IDEA Part B confidentiality requirements include some of the FERPA requirements, in addition to several requirements that are specifically related to children with disabilities. For more information, see the U.S. Department of Education's additional guidance regarding "IDEA and FERPA Confidentiality Provisions" guide released in June 2014: https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/sites/default/files/resource_document/file/IDEA%20FERPA%20Confidentiality%20Provisions%20Comparison%20Chart%2006.06.14.pdf. Schools must give ELs, including ELs with disabilities, equal access to all school facilities and programs, school health offices, and counseling services.
- Public schools must give pregnant students and students with children access to the same accommodations provided to students with temporary medical conditions. These accommodations include time to make up missed classwork and learn in a safe, nonjudgmental environment.
- Child nutrition programs, such as National School Lunch Program,[77] may offer free and reduced-price meals to children in need. Requirements for these programs may change from year to year, and some schools may offer free meals to all students.

[76] The term "educational agency or institution" generally refers to school districts, public elementary and secondary schools, and postsecondary institutions.

[77] National School Lunch Program is a food and nutrition program provided by United States Department of Agriculture. For more information, visit https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/child-nutrition-programs/national-school-lunch-program/.

Suggested Questions to Ask School Staff

The following are sample, optional questions you may ask school staff about the health and safety of your child at school.

Keeping Your Child Safe at School
General Questions

1. Who can I talk with if I am worried about my child's safety at school?
2. Will the school provide an interpreter at the meetings I have with the school staff? If so, how can I request an interpreter?
3. Will the school provide translation services of written materials that were given to me during meetings with school staff?
4. Will the school provide assistance or accommodations if I have a disability and need a sign language interpreter, reader, or note-taker?
5. What rules and practices does the school have to keep my child safe from danger (such as a fire, an active shooter, or a major storm)?
6. What are the school's rules on bullying? Are these rules posted somewhere? If the rules are not posted in my home language, does the school have someone who can translate them for me?
7. How do I talk to my child about bullying? Who can I talk to if I think my child is being bullied or not being treated with respect?
8. Who can I talk to if I am worried about my child's emotional health?
9. Does the school train the school staff to help with my child's emotional health?
10. What community partnerships[78] does the school have to help with my child's emotional health?
11. Is counseling available in our home language?
12. How is school bus safety monitored? How are problems on the bus reported to the school and parents?
13. We live near the school. Is it safe for my child to walk to and from school? Have there been incidents that I should know about? Does the school do anything to keep children safe who are walking to and from school?
14. Will the school or teacher keep information about my child confidential? How is my child's and family's information protected?
15. Does the school share information about my child or family's immigration status with anyone?

Keeping Your Child Healthy at School
General Questions

1. If my child is feeling sick, when do I need to keep him or her home from school? Do I need to call and tell the school that my child is sick? What number do I need to call?
2. Does the school have menus of what will be served at school for breakfast, snack, and lunch? Can I see these menus in my home language?
3. My child has food allergies. How will the school make sure he or she is not given food that will make him or her sick?

[78] A community partner may be a local, state, national, international, public, community-based, private, or academic organization. Some examples might include libraries, colleges, universities, YMCA, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, zoos, museums, recreational centers, and newspapers.

4. My child has diabetes and needs to have frequent snacks during the school day. Will the school give the snacks to my child, or do I need to provide them? Will my child be given the time to eat them?
5. Because of our religion, my child will need to fast on some days. What are the school's rules and practices for this?
6. How much does breakfast or lunch cost? Do I pay with a credit card, check, or in cash? Is there another way to pay for meals? Can I set up an online account to pay for my child's meals in advance? How can I know how much is in the account? Will someone let me know when my child needs more money?
7. How do I apply for free and reduced-price meals? Is the application in my home language? Who can help me complete the application? How long does it take before my child can receive free or reduced-price meals?
8. If my child has a medical or other health condition, such as seizures, what does the school need to know and what do I need to do so my child can take medications at school?
9. Does the school partner with any low-cost, medical, dental, and vision care providers where I can take my child? Do you know if any of these places have staff who speak my home language or have interpreters?

Tips for Families

- Let the school know when your child will be absent. Attendance affects your child's learning and grades.
- Look at your child's schoolwork and make sure your child finishes it.
- Let the school know if your child has a food allergy or other food-related medical condition, such as diabetes.
- Ask the school staff how to apply for free or reduced-price school meals. Schools often have application forms in their main offices.
- Always let the school know if your child has a medical or health condition or needs to take medication at school.
- Some schools have rules on fasting at school, especially for young children. Talk with the school if your child is in an early childhood or elementary program and will need to fast.

Resources

Keeping Your Child Safe at School

HealthyChildren.org provides a webpage called ***School Safety During Emergencies****: What Parents Need to Know*. It helps parents learn about the actions schools across the country are taking to make themselves safer and better prepared for an emergency. https://www.healthychildren.org/spanish/safety-prevention/all-around/paginas/actions-schools-are-taking-to-make-themselves-safer.aspx. ***This resource is available in English and Spanish.***

StopBullying.gov has many resources to teach families about bullying prevention and intervention. It is a website managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://www.stopbullying.gov/. ***This resource is available in numerous languages, including Spanish, Korean, Arabic, Chinese, and Vietnamese.***

The National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) includes millions of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business and community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and the

promotion of family engagement in schools. Its website has facts and resources on ways to keep your child safe and healthy, including information on topics such as flu prevention, school food programs, obesity prevention, injury prevention, school safety, and emotional health. https://www.pta.org/home/family-resources. ***This resource is available in English and Spanish.***

Keeping Your Child Healthy at School

The **AttendanceWorks** website provides a webpage called *When Is Sick Too Sick for School?* It has tips for parents about how to decide when to send a child to school or keep them home. It is available in English and Spanish. https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/messaging/how-sick-is-too-sick/

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Parent Information provides resources for parents of children of various age groups. These resources offer information, tips, and suggestions regarding children's health and safety at home and in the community. The resource also has a page on parent engagement in schools, which contains additional resources on how parents can get involved in their children's schools to support students' health and safety. https://www.cdc.gov/parents/

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Parent Information Adolescent and School Health. This resource provides information on the health and safety of adolescents and the relationship between health and academic achievement. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/health_and_academics/index.htm

Resources for Parents and Caregivers are provided by The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN). These resources include age-related reactions to a traumatic event; bullying; discipline; grief resources; tips for military families; children's books related to hurricanes, earthquakes, and the death of a parent; and resources on sibling death, medical trauma/hospital stay, abuse (various types), terrorism, and natural disasters. https://learn.nctsn.org/

United States Department of Agriculture Child Nutrition Programs. This resource provides information on various child nutrition programs. https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn

United States Department of Agriculture National School Lunch Program. This resource provides information on National School Lunch Program, a federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential childcare institutions. It provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost, or free lunches to children each school day.

U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR). (2015) *Dear Colleague Letter: English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents.* Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf. This Dear Colleague letter reminds states, school districts, and schools of their obligations under federal law to ensure that English learner students have equal access to a high-quality education and the opportunity to achieve their full academic potential. More information about OCR, including how to file a complaint, can be found at https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html. ***This resource is available in numerous languages, including Spanish, Korean, Arabic, Chinese, and Vietnamese.***

Definitions

A magnet school is defined in the ESEA, for purposes of the federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program, as "a public elementary school, public secondary school, public elementary education center, or public secondary education center that offers a special curriculum capable of attracting substantial numbers of students of different racial backgrounds." Magnet schools may offer special instruction in academic content like science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) or different languages. Magnet schools do not charge tuition to families, though they may have a separate admissions process. Magnet schools must comply with local, state, and federal laws.

A **public charter school** is a publicly funded school that is typically governed by a group or organization under a legislative contract (or charter) with the state, district, or other entity. It provides an elementary or secondary education program or both. Charter schools are free from some state or local rules and regulations, but they do need to meet the accountability standards outlined in their charters. A school's charter is reviewed periodically by the entity that granted it and can be taken away if guidelines on curriculum and management are not followed or if the accountability standards are not met.[79] Public charter schools vary according to a state's charter school laws so characteristics such as the curriculum they use or the programs they offer may differ from state to state. However, there are some common characteristics of charter schools. Among these, families choose to apply to have a child attend a charter school and attendance is free. Public charter schools also differ from traditional public schools because they can use innovative educational practices. Charter schools may offer in-person, online, and hybrid classes. A charter school that receives federal money must comply with all applicable federal requirements. The U.S. Department of Education's **Office of Elementary and Secondary Education operates the Expanding Opportunity Through Quality Charter Schools Program (CSP)**, which provides money to, among other things, support the creation of new charter schools and the replication and expansion of existing, high-quality charter schools. A charter school receiving CSP money must meet the definition of a charter school in section 4310(2) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). See https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-formula-grants/school-support-and-accountability/essa-legislation-table-contents/title-iv-21st-century-schools/#sec4310 for more information.

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 a clearer understanding and are not meant as endorsements.

[79] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). *The condition of education 2021: Public charter school enrollment* (2009–2018). Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgb.asp.

Chapter 6
Helping Your Child Be Successful in School

"Helping Your Child Be Successful in School" is the sixth and final chapter of the English Learner Family Toolkit, which is meant to support families of English learners (ELs) in the U.S. education system. Each chapter has five parts: (1) Overview, (2) Family and Student Rights, (3) Suggested Questions to Ask School Staff, (4) Tips for Families, and (5) Resources. Information in each chapter varies. As readers can choose to access only certain chapters of the toolkit, it is important to note that some information may be repeated in multiple chapters.

Overview

Schools in the U.S. see families as partners in their child's education. Your child's school may have events for your family to attend. These events may include meetings with your child's teacher(s), social gatherings, and student performances, like concerts or plays. When you have questions, contact your child's teacher(s) or school staff.

You can help your child be successful in school. Know the school's attendance rules. Know how the school reports your child's progress. Ask if your child has homework and help your child in doing his or her homework every day. If your child needs more help with homework, ask your child's teacher(s) or other school staff about tutoring services.

Schools want to be partners with families. Your school-family partnership will help your child to succeed academically and in life.

Family and Student Rights

As a family member with school-aged children, you have certain rights. *This is very important.* A parent's home country, citizenship, or immigration status does not change these rights. These rights include the following:

- Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) says that school districts must provide the required communications to parents of ELs under Title I in an understandable format and, when possible, in a language that the parents understand.[80] They must provide information to all parents regardless of their native language or proficiency in English about any program, service, or activity of a school district.[81] Additionally, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires that school districts and SEAs ensure meaningful communication with LEP parents in a language they can understand and to adequately notify LEP parents of information about any program, service, or activity of a school district or SEA that is called to the attention of non-LEP parents.[82] The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that consent (agreement or permission) from parents must be requested in the parent's native language, or through another form of communication understandable to the parents.[83] Communication to parents may include information about
  - enrollment and registration;
  - language assistance;

[80] ESEA 1112(e)(4).

[81] U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights & U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. *Fact sheet: Information for limited English proficient (LEP) parents and guardians and for schools and school districts that communicate with them.* Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf.

[82] U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights & U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. *Fact sheet: Information for limited English proficient (LEP) parents and guardians and for schools and school districts that communicate with them.* Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf.

[83] IDEA, 34 CFR 300.9.

  - grievance procedures;[84]
  - notices of nondiscrimination;[85]
  - student discipline policies and procedures;
  - report cards;
  - requests for parent permission for student participation in district or school activities;
  - parent-teacher conferences;
  - parent handbooks;
  - gifted and talented education (GATE) programs;[86]
  - disability-related services[87] for students with disabilities;
  - magnet and charter schools;[88]
  - language instruction educational programs;
  - childcare; or
  - extracurricular activities.

- Public schools must test students each year in third through eighth grade, and at least one time in high school in reading/language arts and mathematics. Public schools also must test students once in each grade span (third through fifth, sixth through ninth, and 10th through 12th grades) in science. Each state chooses which tests[89] will be used in all its public schools. Schools must also test all ELs in grades K–12 each year for English proficiency.
- When testing academic achievement and English language proficiency, all states and school districts must provide appropriate accommodations on content (subject) tests and English language proficiency (ELP) assessments to students with disabilities and to ELs. States and school districts must provide an alternate (different) assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who cannot take the regular test, even with accommodations.
- Schools must give ELs, including ELs with disabilities, equal opportunities to participate in all curricular and extracurricular activities. Curricular activities include courses required for graduation, specialized and advanced courses, and programs. Extracurricular activities include sports and activities, such as clubs and music.
- Each state has laws that require school attendance for children of certain ages. The ages may be different in different states. For example, some states require children to attend school from age 6 through high school.
- Parents have the right to know how their children are doing in school. Parents should be able to contact school staff for information related to their children. Schools often send progress reports home to parents and ask parents to attend at least one parent-teacher conference each year.

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[84] A grievance procedure is an internal conflict resolution process that may address formal complaints by individuals. Developing, publicizing, and effectively implementing these procedures gives students and parents opportunities to address concerns at the local level. See https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/grievance.html.

[85] Notices of nondiscrimination require that schools notify students, parents, and others that they do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, and age, and, if applicable, that they provide equal access to the Boy Scouts of America and other designated youth groups. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/nondisc.html.

[86] Gifted education programs provide educational practices, procedures, and approaches for children who have been identified as gifted or talented. The main goals of these programs are generally enrichment and acceleration.

[87] The term "disability-related services" may refer either to special education and related services provided to children with disabilities who are eligible for services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and/or regular or special education and related aids and services provided to qualified students with disabilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. See Chapter 3 for more information on disability-related services for EL students with disabilities.

[88] See definitions in Resources.

[89] Tests may also be called assessments.

- Students have the right to be free from discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, and disability.[90]

Suggested Questions to Ask School Staff

The following are sample, optional questions you may ask school staff to help your child be successful in school.

General Questions

1. How can I contact my child's teacher(s) and the school staff? Do teachers prefer emails, texts, or phone calls? Is there an interpreter who can help me?
2. Does the school have a calendar that shows important dates I should know about (like start and end dates of the school year, parent/teacher conferences, and back-to-school nights)?
3. How can I ask for an interpreter at school events? If I am working on the day of an event, can another family member attend? How do I tell the school that someone else is coming instead of me?
4. How can I get involved with the school? Can I volunteer at the school? Are there any groups or programs for families of ELs? Are there any groups or programs for immigrant families?

Expectations

1. How can I find out what my child is learning in school? How is the school helping my child learn English? What are the learning goals in my child's classes? What are the goals for learning English? Who can give us that information?
2. What are the rules about how often my child can miss school?
3. What do I need to know about grade and promotion (going to the next grade) rules at this school? Will I get a report card for my child? If not, is there an online system the school uses to share grades (such as a student information system)? How do I learn to use this system? How will my child be graded in content areas like math while he or she is learning English?
4. Are there homework rules for the whole school, or is homework up to my child's teacher(s)? How will I know if my child has homework and how well he or she is doing it?
5. What other activities should my child do besides homework to help him or her learn (math drills, reading, learning facts, visiting museums, strategy games, etc.)? What can we do to help with his or her learning?
6. Who can help us with planning for high school? How do we get advice and counseling about our options for classes? Who can talk to me about my child's goals and set goals for his or her coursework? Is there an interpreter who can help at this meeting? Which classes are required (needed) for graduation? How can I know that my child is taking the classes he or she needs to go to college?
7. How are transcripts from other countries used to decide grade level and course placement?
8. How do you help students set college and career goals? How do you involve families in these discussions?

[90] Educational institutions have a responsibility to protect every student's right to learn in a safe environment free from unlawful discrimination and to prevent unjust deprivations of that right. The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces several federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance from the Department of Education. Discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin is prohibited by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (This includes discrimination based on a person's limited English proficiency or English learner status; and actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics, including membership in a religion that may be perceived to exhibit such characteristics (such as Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh individuals)); sex discrimination is prohibited by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; discrimination on the basis of disability is prohibited by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and age discrimination is prohibited by the Age Discrimination Act of 1975. OCR also has responsibilities under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which prohibits disability discrimination by public entities, whether or not they receive federal financial assistance.

Tests, Progress Reports, and Supports

1. How will I know if my child is doing well in the courses needed for promotion (going to the next grade) or graduation? If I have questions about my child's progress, whom can I speak with?
2. What services does the school offer to help my child learn English? How can I help my child learn English if I don't speak English well?
3. How often does the school send progress reports home?
4. What do I need to know about state tests? What tests will my child have to take and when are these tests given? What types of supports/accommodations can my child get when taking tests (for example, do they offer extended time or a bilingual dictionary)? If my child has an individualized education program (IEP) or is receiving Section 504 services, how can I know that the required supports are being given to my child?
5. Are any tests given in our home language? How can I help my child get ready for state tests? How will I know the results of these tests? Will you provide the results in a language I understand? Are state tests taken on a computer or by paper and pencil? How are the test results used?
6. How can I get help for my child with his or her classes? Does the school offer free or low-cost tutoring for my child? If yes, how do I get this tutoring for my child?
7. How can my child get help with his or her homework? Are there any websites or telephone hotlines that can help us?
8. If my child fails a class, what can he or she do?
9. How do I know if my child is on track to graduate? Which classes are needed for graduation with a regular high school diploma?
10. If my child is not able to meet the requirements to graduate with a regular high school diploma, can my child graduate with an alternative (different) high school diploma, certificate, or another credential? If yes, does the school or district offer an alternative high school diploma, certificate, or other credential? What does my child need to do to get it?
11. How can I know that my child is taking the classes he or she needs to go to a college or university? Who can help us with college planning, applications, and financial aid for college? If my child is undocumented, can he or she get help with college planning and financial aid?
12. Can my child enroll in dual enrollment courses to earn credits towards college or university?
13. My child wants to take career and technical education (CTE) courses. Who should my child and I speak with about this?

Tips for Families

- Your help is important for your child's school success. Have high expectations; ask your child about school; check your child's homework and school progress; talk about academic and career goals with your child and the school; talk to the school about which courses your child needs to take to meet those goals.
- You can also encourage a love of learning through your home language. Read with your child in your home language. Practice storytelling to develop language and critical-thinking skills.
- State departments of education and school district websites have information about state tests. Schools may have an "assessment coordinator." This is a staff member who will talk about state tests with parents.
- Depending on the state's rules, the school may send test results to parents. Parents may ask a teacher or counselor to explain test results and what the results mean for their child. Ask for an interpreter, if needed. In some districts or schools, school staff can give test results in your home language.
- School calendars are often available from the school office. Calendars are often published on the school's website. You can ask your school to translate calendars into your home language.
- School attendance is important for your child. Poor attendance often leads to lower grades and slower progress.
- Many schools have an online parent portal. Parent portals may have information about school rules, classroom goals, assignments, and student progress.
- Schools help students make up for failed classes. Ask about summer school courses, online classes, and credit recovery programs.
- State Department of Education websites, school websites, and guidance counselors should be able to provide you with information about graduation requirements in your state.

Resources

Elementary School

ESSA Advocacy Toolkit. National Center for Learning Disabilities. https://www.ncld.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/ESSA_Understood_Final_Monday_030617.pdf

Growth Mindset: Parents can access the Mindset Kit website to learn about a growth mindset and why it's important for children. The website offers examples of ways parents may support their children in gaining a growth mindset. https://www.mindsetkit.org/mentalidad-de-crecimiento-padres. ***This resource is available in English and Spanish.***

Illinois Early Learning Tip Sheets are easy-to-read, one-page resources on a variety of topics. These may be of interest to parents and teachers of young children. ***All tip sheets are available in English, Spanish, and Polish. Selected tip sheets are available in Korean, Chinese, Arabic, and French.*** https://illinoisearlylearning.org/resources/tipsheets/

Minnesota Humanities Center provides reading tips for families of young children, ***available in English, Spanish, Arabic, French, Vietnamese, Amharic, Bosnian, Burmese, Chinese, Farsi, Green Hmong, White Hmong, Japanese, Hindi, Lao, Mende, Nuer, Oromo, Romanian, Russian, Somali, Tibetan, Urdu, and Tigrinya.*** http://humanitieslearning.org/resource/index.cfm?act=1&TagID=0&CatID=0&SearchText=tips%20for%20reading%20with%20children&SortBy=1&mediatype=0&lurl=1

The **National Parent Teacher Association (PTA)** includes millions of families, students, teachers, administrators, and business and community leaders devoted to the educational success of children and the promotion of family engagement in schools. Its website has resources on supporting college and career readiness for your child. https://www.pta.org/home/family-resources. ***This resource is available in English and Spanish.***

Teachers and Families of Dual Language Learners (DLLs): Partners from the Start**.** This webpage has information for families and teachers about how to help students with dual languages. https://illinoisearlylearning.org/blogs/dll/partners/. ***This resource is available in English and Spanish.***

Telemundo has **education tips and videos** for Spanish-speaking families and students. https://www.telemundo.com/el-poder-en-ti/tu-educacion. ***This resource is available in Spanish.***

Middle/High School

The EducationQuest Foundation website provides free **college planning resources** in English and Spanish. https://www.educationquest.org/resources/spanish-resources/. ***This resource is available in English and Spanish.***

The Hispanic Scholarship Fund website has helpful resources, from **how to prepare for college,** to interviewing tips, and scholarship information. https://www.hsf.net/preparing-for-college. ***This resource is available in English and Spanish.***

The University of Chicago provides an information sheet for parents of students entering **high school**. The sheet explains what is important for student success in high school and beyond. https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/2018-10/5124whatmatters-parentspanish.pdf. ***This resource is available in English and Spanish.***

Postsecondary Education

Federal Student Aid is an office of the United States Department of Education that provides information about applying for financial aid for students who plan to attend career schools, colleges, and universities. The website offers resources and guidance for students in families for applying, receiving, and repaying college loans. https://studentaid.gov/. ***This resource is available in English and Spanish.***

The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators offers a "Tip Sheet for Undocumented Students." It answers questions about paying for postsecondary education (e.g., professional certification, community college, university, graduate school). https://www.nasfaa.org/uploads/documents/Tip_Sheet_for_Undocumented_Students_2017.pdf

U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR). (2015). *Dear Colleague Letter: English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents.* Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf. This Dear Colleague letter reminds states, school districts, and schools of their obligations under federal law to ensure that English learner students have equal access to a high-quality education and the opportunity to achieve their full academic potential. More information about OCR, including how to file a complaint, can be found at https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html. ***This resource is available in numerous languages, including Spanish, Korean, Arabic, Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese.***

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Chapter 7
Supporting Your English Learner's Literacy Development

"Supporting your English Learner's Literacy Development" is the seventh chapter of the English Learner Family Toolkit, which is meant to support families of English learners (ELs) in the U.S. education system. This chapter has seven parts: (1) Overview, (2) Stages of Literacy Development, (3) Essential Components of English Learners' Literacy Instruction, (4) The Value of Bilingualism and Biliteracy, (5) Suggested Questions to Ask School Staff, (6) Tips for Families, and (7) Resources. Information in each chapter varies. Since readers can choose to only access certain chapters of the toolkit, it is important to note that some information may be repeated in multiple chapters.

Overview

Unlike language development, literacy is typically developed through formal instruction. Thus, it is important for families to understand how children develop literacy skills beginning as babies and continuing into adulthood. In your role as partner in your child's education, you can participate in your child's academic success by learning about effective literacy practices that can be implemented both in English and/or in the home language. Knowing the value of bilingualism and biliteracy can support you in strengthening and continuing the development of your child's first language at home, contributing to their academic success and lifelong opportunities. Building strong family-school relationships will help you to better communicate with educators, understand your child's literacy strengths and needs, and enable you to advocate for your child to receive research-based literacy instruction.

Stages of Literacy Development

Literacy is the ability to read and write effectively. Literacy develops over time through meaningful learning experiences at home, school, and in the community. The stages below describe a progression of literacy development starting at birth and continuing throughout life. These stages are similar regardless of the home language. Supporting each stage of development in your native language is important for your child's academic success. A strong foundation in the home language helps children develop literacy.[1] Once your child begins school, that support should continue even if your child is in a program where instruction is mostly in English. Bilingualism does not confuse children – it aids learning.

Stage 0: Your Child from Birth to 4 years (Preschool)

- Begins to develop an understanding about books and print and display important pre-reading behaviors like holding books, turning pages, and pretending to read.
- Holds writing instruments and progresses from making marks and scribbling to drawing.
- Experiences rapid growth in vocabulary and learning new concepts.

[1] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2017). *Promoting the educational success of children and youth learning English: Promising futures*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press; Hancock, D.R. (2002). The effects of native language books on the pre-literacy skill development of language minority kindergarteners. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, *17*(1), 62–68. https://doi.org/10.1080/02568540209594999

Stage 1: Your Child Learning to Read and Write (Grades Transitional Kindergarten[2]–2)

- Learns how written language works by connecting letters, sounds, and words.
- Reads simple texts independently.
- Interacts with more complex text through teacher read-alouds to develop oral language, reading comprehension, and rich vocabulary.
- Writing moves from copying and writing simple sentences to writing simple stories.

Stage 2: Your Child as a Fluent Reader and Writer (Grades 2–4)

- Integrates the ability to decode with their growing oral language vocabulary to comprehend text and read with increasing accuracy, expression, and fluency.
- Gains meaning from text and discusses the key ideas with the teacher and peers.
- Interacts with more complex text through teacher read-alouds to continue developing oral language, reading comprehension, and rich vocabulary.
- Writes different types of texts, such as poems, letters, stories, and expository paragraphs or essays.

Stage 3: Your Child Reading and Writing to Learn (Grades 4–8)

- Reads to learn and understand new ideas about academic subject matter.
- Learns and uses content vocabulary and increasingly complex concepts to write different types of texts.
- Reads and produces informational and literary texts with increasing independence.

Stage 4: Your Child as a Skilled and Analytical Reader and Writer (Grades 9–12)

- Reads widely across genres and disciplines.
- Analyzes themes, arguments, and evidence.
- Synthesizes information from a variety of sources.
- Communicates understanding through discussion and writing.

Regardless of a child's age or stage of literacy development, you play a critical role in fostering language and literacy through everyday interactions and experiences. Beginning with playing, singing, talking, and listening to storytelling in the earliest stages, children who begin school with a large and varied vocabulary usually have strong reading comprehension by the time they are in third grade.[3] As children move through their school years, it is important to continue to support literacy development by engaging in meaningful conversations, nurturing the home language, encouraging reading and writing, and supporting educational aspirations. These experiences help your child build the language, literacy, and critical thinking skills needed for academic success. Strong family engagement fosters resilience and confidence to help students succeed academically and become active, informed members of their community.

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[2] Transitional Kindergarten (TK) is defined as the first year of a 2-year Kindergarten program for children whose birthday falls between September 2 and December 2. Age cutoffs and eligibility can vary by state. TK's goal is to serve as a bridge between preschool and traditional kindergarten. Several states offer TK including California, Texas, Florida, Illinois, New York, and North Carolina.

[3] Lee, J. (2011). Size matters: Early vocabulary as a predictor of language and literacy competence. *Applied Psycholinguistics, 32*(1):69–92.

Essential Components of English Learners' Literacy Instruction

As described earlier, ELs go through the same stages of development as monolingual English speakers. Similarly, ELs benefit from instruction targeting the same essential research-based components of reading identified for monolingual English speakers — phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.

However, research shows that ELs require additional supports because they are simultaneously learning English in which literacy instruction occurs. Evidence indicates that effective literacy instruction for ELs should help students develop language, access content, and build on their strengths as bilingual learners.[4] It is crucial for teachers to deliver instruction that:

- **Intentionally Develops English Oral Language**
  Teachers develop English oral language by (1) providing dedicated and focused instruction targeting the child's proficiency level in the second language (designated-ELD) at a separate time during the school day for elementary school children; or a separate ELD course for secondary students and (2) providing opportunities to discuss academic content with peers to apply vocabulary and develop understanding of concepts.

- **Builds Metalinguistic Awareness**
  Building metalinguistic awareness means that the classroom teacher promotes and guides children to think and talk about language so that they notice how language works, not just use it. For example, children demonstrate metalinguistic awareness when they recognize that words can have more than one meaning, hear similarities in sounds, understand rhymes, or explain why a sentence sounds correct or incorrect. A child who laughs at a joke based on the double meaning of a word, or notices that cat, hat, and bat rhyme, is showing metalinguistic awareness.

  In the case of bilingual children, they learn to notice similarities and differences between their home language and the second language they are learning at school. For instance, they learn to recognize similarities between words in English and Spanish with similar spelling or meaning like invitation and invitación.

- **Builds and Activates Schema**
  "Schema" refers to the background knowledge and experiences that children use to make sense of new information. Teachers build schema by helping students connect new learning to what they already know from their homes, communities, cultures, and previous learning experiences.

  For example, a child who has been to the beach will find it easier to understand a lesson or unit about the ocean because they can connect new information to what they have seen and experienced.

  Schema building and metalinguistic awareness support reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and communication abilities.[5]

- **Develops Literacy in the First Language**
  Research has shown that students who continue to develop language proficiency and literacy in their

[4] Baker, S. K., Gersten, R., Dimino, J., Haymond, K., Jayanthi, M., Kieffer, M. J., Lesaux, N. K., Linan-Thompson, S., Morris, J., Newman-Gonchar, R., & Proctor, C. P. (2014). *Teaching academic content and literacy to English learners in elementary and middle school* (NCEE 2014-4012). Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/19; Goodall, M. V., Gomez, M., & Webster, D. W. (2024). Effective instruction: The intersection of structured literacy and second-language acquisition for multilingual learners. *The Reading League Journal*, *5*(3), 43–49; Hsin, L. B., Phillips Galloway, E., & Vaughn, S. (2026). Toward a science of strengths-based approaches to reading for English learners in K–12 schools. *Reading Research Quarterly*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.70084; National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth. (2006). *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

[5] National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth. (2006). *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

home languages by participating in bilingual or dual language programs attain higher or the same levels of academic achievement as their monolingual counterparts.[6]

Together, oral language development, metalinguistic awareness, schema building, and home language development provide a comprehensive framework for supporting ELs' academic success while recognizing bilingualism as an educational asset rather than a barrier.

The Value of Bilingualism and Biliteracy

Common Concerns and Misconceptions

As a caregiver, you might have concerns or misunderstandings about continuing to develop the native language at home or enrolling your child in a bilingual or dual language program. These concerns are not supported by research in language and bilingual literacy development. There are many benefits to bilingualism and biliteracy. The table below lists common misconceptions and the research findings that counter these misunderstandings.

Table 1: Misconceptions vs. Evidence: Evidence for Bilingual & Biliteracy Development

Misconceptions	Evidence
Speaking the home language will hinder my child's development of English and their academic success.	A strong first language supports learning a second language because many language and literacy skills transfer across languages.[7] Children benefit when parents communicate in the language they know best because it provides richer vocabulary and more complex language models.[8]
Learning two languages can lead to speech delays.	Bilingualism does not cause speech or language delays. A true language disorder will appear across all languages a child speaks. Learning two languages does not create a disorder.[9]
Learning two languages will confuse my child.	Research shows no evidence that bilingual children are confused by exposure to multiple languages. Infants can discriminate between different languages within the first months of life and develop separate language systems as they grow.[10]
My child will struggle to keep languages separate.	Studies show that children naturally separate languages, although they may engage in code-switching (using elements of two languages in the same conversation). Code-switching is a normal communication strategy, not evidence of confusion. When a bilingual child does not know a word in one language, they might borrow the word from the other language.[11]
Speaking the native language at home is enough to maintain bilingualism.	Research indicates that without continued support, language loss can occur, especially for minority-language speakers. Children need sustained exposure, interaction, reading, writing, and opportunities to use the language in various settings.[12]

[6] U.S. Department of Education, National Clearinghouse of English Language Acquisition. (2024). *Dual Language Immersion Playbooks*. U.S. Department of Education. https://ncela.ed.gov/sites/default/files/2024-12/dual-language-playbook-full-20241219.pdf

[7] Durgunoğlu, A. Y. (2017). An updated review of cross-language transfer and its educational implications. In E. Segers & P. van den Broek (Eds.), *Developmental Perspectives in Written Language and Literacy: In Honor of Ludo Verhoeven* (pp. 167–182). John Benjamins Publishing Company. https://doi.org/10.1075/z.206.11dur

[8] Byers-Heinlein K, Lew-Williams C. (2013). Bilingualism in the early years: What the science says. *Learn Landscape. 7*(1):95–112.

[9] Paradis J., Genesee F., Crago M. B. (2010). Dual language development and disorders. Baltimore: Paul H Brookes Publishing Company.

[10] De Houwer, A. (2024). Myths about bilingual development and why they hurt. *Babylonia Journal of Language Education, 3*, 46–49. https://doi.org/10.55393/babylonia.v3i.507

[11] Byers-Heinlein K., Lew-Williams C. (2013). Bilingualism in the early years: What the science says. *Learn Landscape. 7*(1):95–112.

[12] De Houwer, A. (2021). *Bilingual development in childhood.* Cambridge, Mass.

Misconceptions	Evidence
Enrolling my child in a dual language program will delay their English acquisition and academic progress.	Studies have found that ELs in dual language programs are more likely to reach English proficiency and be reclassified and less likely to be identified as long-term ELs. Similarly, they score higher in literacy assessments than their peers in English-only programs at both elementary and secondary levels.[13]

Benefits of Bilingualism and Biliteracy

Research has shown that there are many benefits to being bilingual and biliterate regarding brain health, learning, and education. Below are some of the benefits associated with bilingualism and biliteracy.[14]

- **Brain and cognitive benefits** such as the ability to concentrate on tasks and multitask, improved memory, and increased awareness of language.
- **Economic benefits** such as greater employment opportunities and increased salary potential.
- **Education benefits** such as higher levels of performance on achievement tests associated with higher levels of proficiency in two languages.

13 What Works Clearinghouse, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. (2023, December). *Dual language programs.* https://whatworks.ed.gov; Thomas, W. P., & Collier, V. P. (2017). Validating the power of bilingual schooling: Thirty-two years of large-scale, longitudinal research. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 37*:203–217. doi:10.1017/S0267190517000034; August, D., & Shanahan, T. (Eds.). (2006). *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on language-minority children and youth*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

14 U.S. Department of Education, National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (2024). *The economic benefits of multilingualism.* https://ncela.ed.gov/resources/infographic-the-economic-benefits-of-multilingualism-july-2024;
U.S. Department of Education, National Clearinghouse of English Language Acquisition (2020). *The benefits of multilingualism.* https://ncela.ed.gov/resources/infographic-benefits-of-multilingualism-english-august-2020

Suggested Questions to Ask School Staff

The following are sample questions you could ask school staff to gauge and support your child's academic and literacy progress:

1. How can I find out what my child is learning in school?
2. How does the school help my child become proficient in English?
3. My child goes to another teacher to learn English during their class's regular Language Arts instructional time. How does that affect their ability to learn to read and write?
4. What are my child's learning/literacy goals? Who can give me that information?
5. How does the school teach reading and writing?
6. What services does the school offer to help my child learn to read and write in English? How can I help my child if I do not read or write English well?
7. What resources does my child have available to learn how to read and write (e.g., bilingual dictionaries, textbooks) in the home language?
8. Does the school offer classes/programs to support literacy development in another language?
9. How can I contact my child's teacher(s) and the school staff? Is there an interpreter who can help me?
10. How is my child progressing in literacy development compared to other ELs and English-only speakers?
11. What academic and linguistic needs does my child have that might keep them from meeting grade level and English language proficiency goals?
12. Does my child have homework every day? What can I do to help my child with the homework? Who can help my child at school if they need more help?
13. What other activities should my child do, besides homework, to foster literacy development (e.g., reading every day, visiting museums)?
14. Does the school district offer the Seal of Biliteracy? What are the criteria to earn the Seal of Biliteracy?

Tips for Families

From birth and beyond, you play an important role in your child's literacy development by interacting with your child in your strongest language through the following activities:

- **Birth to 4 years (Preschool)**
  - Read board books, nursery rhymes. As your child develops, add picture books, counting and alphabet books, and fairy tales.
  - Make markers, crayons, pencils, pens, or other types of writing utensils and all types of paper (e.g., notepads, construction paper) available to encourage experimenting with writing.
  - Provide puzzles, alphabet boards, and puppets.
  - Encourage imaginary play — house, school, and store.

- **Elementary Grades (TK–5)**
  - Talk with your child about cultural traditions and family stories.
  - Establish a routine to read with your child for at least 20 minutes and for your child to read independently (e.g., during bedtime, commuting).
  - Talk about new words.
  - Encourage retelling and discussion after reading.
  - Provide writing materials such as pencils, crayons, and all types of paper (e.g., notepads and notebooks) to promote journaling, creating stories, and drawing.
  - Write in front of your children (e.g., grocery lists, letters, notes) to model how writing skills are useful in everyday life.
  - Visit the public library. Allow children to select books. Be a model by reading and checking out books and magazines in English or in your home language.
  - Experience a variety of enriching experiences around the community (e.g., parks, museums, fairs).
  - Limit screen time (e.g., TV, video games, phone).
  - Encourage your child to read and write in both languages.
  - Consider enrolling your child in bilingual or dual language immersion programs if the school offers them.
- **Secondary Grades (6–12)**
  - Support goal setting related to college, career, or technical/trade schools.
  - Support consistent independent reading habits.
  - Encourage and facilitate using library resources.
  - Encourage continued literacy development in the home language.
  - Engage in discussions about books, articles, and current events by asking open-ended questions and connecting reading to personal experiences and future goals.
  - Monitor the use of digital resources.
  - Work with the school to make sure your child can enroll in heritage language classes, including classes that offer college credits in the home language such as the Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate program.
  - Learn about pathways to obtain the Seal of Biliteracy at your child's school.
  - If your child is new to the U.S. and enrolling in school for the first time, ask whether the school offers a Newcomer Program. Ask how long the program lasts and what services and supports it provides.

Resources

These websites offer a variety of resources for parents to actively support their children's literacy development.

Barbara Bush Foundation. Provides high-quality programs, resources, education initiatives, and research to help families and communities nationwide. https://www.barbarabush.org/toolkit-for-at-home-learning/

CommonSense Media. Provides families with free resources such as guides and reviews to help parents navigate their children's (ages 2–15) interactions with media and technology. Wide Open School | Common Sense Media

Guia Infantil (Spanish). Offers free articles and tips for parents to support their child's education and well-being. https://www.guiainfantil.com/

Great Schools. Provides high-quality education information to guide families through every stage of their child's learning. https://www.greatschools.org/

Head Start. Provides a guide for parents offering tips to engage in the Kindergarten transition and how to support children throughout the process of starting school. Your Child Is Going to Kindergarten: Making the Move Together | HeadStart.gov. The website also offers health tips on nutrition, oral health, injury prevention and other topics. Health Tips for Families Series | HeadStart.gov

National Association for Bilingual Education. A non-profit membership organization that works to advocate for educational and academic excellence for bilingual/multilingual students. https://nabe.org/?s=parent+resources

National Center on Improving Literacy. Provides families with actionable guidance, activities, and insights to strengthen literacy development at home and foster meaningful home-school literacy partnerships. https://improvingliteracy.org/

Parent Power. Provides evidence-based support directly to families and educators to strengthen school-family partnerships. Four Reasons Why Parental Involvement Matters for Newcomers — And How To Help

Reading Rockets. Offers research-based reading strategies, lessons, and activities designed to help children from birth to age 8 learn how to read and improve their reading. There are downloadable free reading tips for parents and early literacy professionals, by age and stage, in English and translated into 12 other languages. https://www.readingrockets.org/literacy-home/literacy-tips-activities

Reading Partners. An online learning platform where volunteer tutors, families, and caregivers can explore trainings and resources to become literacy support allies for young students. https://resourcehub.readingpartners.org/families-caregivers/

ReadWorks. Provides a free parent or guardian account to access free reading materials in English and Spanish. https://about.readworks.org/parents_remote.html#webinars

Smithsonian Distance Learning Choice Boards. Introduces students to recommended learning opportunities from across the Smithsonian in science, social studies, culture, and the arts. Includes hands-on and technology-enabled activities in English and Spanish. Smithsonian Distance Learning Resources

Unite for Literacy. Helps families build a daily habit of reading and supports language and literacy development. Provides access to free books in Spanish and English including narration in 43 different languages. https://www.uniteforliteracy.com/

Regional Educational Laboratories (REL) Southeast Video Series. Demonstrates parent-child interactions that support reading and writing development. https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLVHqsnePfULpQeqIT3ZfWcSBsAJJa1b0x; https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLVHqsnePfULqzbnu1BZf50y7HFgGNZp6v

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