

Supporting Educators in Determining Special Education Eligibility of English Learner Students

Carrie Parker
Director of Research

Todd Grindal
Senior Principal
Researcher

Meet the REL NEI team



Carrie Parker, Ed.D.
Director of Research
REL Northeast &
Islands



Todd Grindal, Ed.D.
Principal Researcher
REL Northeast & Islands



Sheila Rodriguez
Research Associate
REL Northeast &
Islands



Elisa Garcia, Ph.D.
Researcher
REL Northeast & Islands

Who we spoke to

 The REL Northeast & Islands team spoke with teachers and administrators about instructional practices for working with English learners in four districts.

	Teachers	Admin/staff
District 1	7	3
District 2	3	4
District 3	4	5
District 4	4	2
Total	18	14

Processes used by districts to serve English learners who are struggling



- Collaboration
- Cultural responsiveness
- Multi-tiered systems of support
- Use of Data and Progress Monitoring

COLLABORATION

Percentage of educators who described aspects of collaboration in meeting the needs of ELs

 While both teachers and administrators agree on the critical importance of collaboration, teachers articulate the barriers more explicitly.

	Percentage
Promising practices	
Teachers collaborate formally and informally	72%
Educators try to collaborate and involve parents in the process of identification	9%
Areas for improvement	
Lack of scheduled collaboration time across departments leads to a need for squeezing in collaboration	25%
Lack of physical proximity leads to less collaboration, and physical proximity promotes informal collaboration	13%
Collaboration slows or stops after disability identification	9%

COLLABORATION

Recommendations

Teachers

- *Maintain existing and expand collaboration between English learner specialists and content-area teachers.*
- Make sure that ESL/bilingual educators are present when discussing EL student progress
- Expand communication during transition from SRBI into special education

Administrators

- *Check in with teachers about their own needs; make sure they have sufficient resources and access to information.*
- *Provide additional resources for involving parents through translators, brief written descriptions of processes, personal check-ins to gauge needs.*
- Protect time for EL, special education, and general education teachers to meet formally – for example, setting aside 1-2 PLC meetings/month.

CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

Leveraging an understanding of culture to support improved interactions with children and parents



The importance of deepening culturally responsive teaching has intensified with the shift to remote learning due to COVID.

...they don't always look you in the eye ... So we are cognizant of things like that. If they look down, it's a sign of respect as opposed to looking you in the eye. We would think that would be respectful, however other cultures (do not).

Classroom teacher discussing how she considers culture when interpreting student behavior

CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

Recommendations

Teachers

- *In all planning and instruction, keep marginalized students at the center.*
- *Build and maintain communication with parents and families; use student's home language, Talking Points app, multiple modes of contact.*
- Recognize that cultural responsiveness begins with self-reflection.
- Engage and value students' cultural knowledge, experiences, and perspectives.

Administrators

- *Make sure that all students have access to sufficient high-quality technology.*
- Understand that cultural responsiveness is not just cultural celebration.
- Support teachers in providing curricula and other instructional materials that reflect students' backgrounds and experiences.
- Join and guide teachers in engaging in critical self-reflection.

MULTI-TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

Teachers adjust MTSS to meet EL needs

He got a good amount of support when he was in third grade. Both with ESL and we were able to get him help with reading ... which sometimes doesn't happen if we have a level 1 EL student...until their level in ESL comes up a little bit. But with this one I pushed pretty hard through the [MTSS] process, ... 'Listen, I really feel there's something else going on and he needs more.'

Classroom teacher describing how she worked to get student interventions even though in that district ELs at level 1 normally don't get interventions

MULTI-TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

Recommendations

Teachers

- *Offer English learners a variety of participation opportunities; use visuals and videos.*
- *Provide small group support targeting English learners and focusing on high-quality language interactions.*
- At each tier, develop individualized strategies rather than packaged interventions.
- Use inclusive practices; engage ELs with non-ELs, and use multiple means of engagement, representation, expression.

Administrators

Participate in and provide opportunities for professional development about:

- Effective instruction for ELs as part of MTSS
- ELs' expected progress in MTSS, and how to identify benchmarks if there are no "true peers" in the school
- Modifications to MTSS to be appropriate for ELs

USE OF DATA AND PROGRESS MONITORING

What does data use and progress monitoring look like in practice?

So we have a student who's making limited progress, and their profile looks like they're level two, and they've been in the country for three years, and they've had support for a year and a half, and so we'll look for other students that kind of fit a similar profile, and we'll look at their rates, and if their learning rates are significantly different then we go okay.

School Administrator describing the use of real peers

Data may be insufficient to make accurate determinations for EL students

My concern is that when we're looking at those scores of both the cognitive and the achievement, what is the norm group? We don't have a norm group for ESL, for English learners. ...I don't even know if it exists. And shame on me for being so many years in the biz and not knowing whether that exists.

District Administrator describing challenges in using data well with ELs

USE OF DATA AND PROGRESS MONITORING

Recommendations

Teachers

- *Use formative assessments as learning opportunities; check in with students and ask them about the most challenging and most helpful aspects of online learning.*
- Identify and use screening tools and assessments using CT SERC website: https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/SRBI/ELEMENTARY_ASSESSMENTS_4-9-12.pdf?la=en and National Center on Intensive Intervention online chart: <https://charts.intensiveintervention.org/chart/academic-screening>.

Administrators

- Find and provide teachers with resources to use culturally appropriate assessments, including translations into other languages as appropriate
- Encourage the use of multiple measures and sources to monitor progress, including assessments, observations, and parent interviews
- Incorporate collaborative data review cycles in teachers' schedules

Specific strategies for distinguishing between disabilities and language development are provided in the companion summary of REL Northeast & Islands webinars from 2018.

Using data and progress monitoring in a tiered intervention framework to provide high-quality individualized instruction to English learners who are struggling



Excerpts from three REL Northeast & Islands webinars, February and March 2018

Remote Learning Resources



Remote learning resources for improving instruction for English learners are more important than ever.

How can educators provide high-quality instruction to English learners (ELs) in an online environment?

https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northeast/Docs/Blog/FAQ_COVID19_SupportsforEnglishLearners_508c.pdf

What are some specific practices used to support English learner students and their families?

https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northeast/Docs/Blog/FAQs_COVID-19_SupportingELsFamilies_508c.pdf

6 Key Considerations for Supporting English Learners with Distance Learning

<https://seal.org/6-key-considerations-for-supporting-english-learners-with-distance-learning/>

Guidance for navigating remote learning for English learner students

<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midwest/blogs/english-learner-remote-learning.aspx>

Dual Language Bilingual Education Implementation in Unprecedented Times: Issues of Equity Amidst the Coronavirus Pandemic

<https://channelviewpublications.wordpress.com/2020/04/16/dual-language-bilingual-education-implementation-in-unprecedented-times-issues-of-equity-amidst-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>

School Responses to COVID-19: ELL/Immigrant Considerations

<https://www.colorincolorado.org/coronavirus-ell>

Using Multilingual Resources to Support English Learners' Remote Learning

<https://www.elsuccessforum.org/resources/using-multilingual-resources-to-support-english-learners-remote-learning>

To Contact the team

Carrie Parker: cparker@edc.org

Sheila Rodriguez: srodriguez@edc.org

Todd Grindal: todd.grindal@sri.com

Elisa Garcia: elisa.garcia@sri.com

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