Frequently Asked Questions About English Language Learners

What qualifies a student as ESL? One student I know speaks English well, but doesn’t read English, but is not classified as ESL.

Students are classified as LEP (limited English proficient) based on their performance on the state’s English language proficiency test. This test measures the student’s ability to read, write, speak and listen in the English language. Students who do not meet the proficiency standard for the test and are classified as LEP are then eligible to receive services from the ESL (English as a Second Language) program. Students are identified as needing this test by the home language survey that they fill out when they enroll in school. If the survey indicates that a student speaks another language other than English, the student is tested. If you think that you may have a student who may be limited English proficient, please get in contact with your school’s ESL department immediately so the proper procedures for identification can be followed.

Should I modify tests and assignments for high performing ESL students even though the EOC is not modified?

Instructional modifications and testing accommodation should be made based on the academic language needs of the student. If the student is performing well in class and on your classroom assessments without modifications, there is no need to do special modifications on tests and assignments, even if the student is currently classified as LEP. HOWEVER, if the student struggles to perform on tests and assignments because of language then appropriate modifications and accommodations can and should be applied. LEP students do qualify for testing accommodations on EOCs if they have scored below a level 5 on the state English language proficiency test. You are modifying for the student in your classroom because of language and feel that the student needs the same accommodations for state testing results to be valid, contact your school’s ESL teacher to find out if your student qualifies for accommodations on state tests.

What are some reading strategies to help ELL’s (English language learners) with reading comprehension (besides visuals)?

Many strategies can support ELLs with reading comprehension. Some good ones, that are also good for the rest of the students in your class can be found here http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/724 and here http://www.all4ed.org/files/archive/publications/SixKeyStrategies.pdf.

What do I do with an ESL student who cannot read or write in any language?

It is very difficult to teach students who do not have literacy skills. Sometimes this is due to limited to no schooling in the home country. For students who have been in the U.S. educational system for several years, but are still not showing progress in literacy, you will want to have an in-depth discussion with your school’s ESL teacher about the academic and language progress of the student to see if there may be other issues that need to be addressed. There are ways to help students with little to no literacy in their native language or in English. For some quick tips, refer to page four of this website http://www.doe.in.gov/lmmp/docs/effective_programs_ell.pdf but it is also strongly recommended that you read the entire article as well. Teaching LEP students with limited schooling requires a team effort, great flexibility and a different set of goals and expectations for the student. The best first step to take when dealing with such a student is to collaborate with all teachers who teach the student to work on implementing a specific course of action that addresses the student’s needs. The article mentioned previously provides guidance on how to do that.

How do we identify students who need RTI as opposed to whether or not it’s just a language barrier? How can I recommend a student for EC services and not have it rejected as “language barrier?”

It is sometimes difficult to discern whether a child is having difficulty with language or may have a disability. The academic behaviors of students with limited English proficiency often mimic that of students with disabilities. The important thing to remember is that being LEP is a temporary condition and that students should make more progress as they learn more English. When analyzing an LEP student’s academic progress you should take several pieces of information into consideration. This includes: the length of time the student has had to study English; whether the student is progressing in a similar fashion that other LEP students with a similar language profile are progressing; the level of native language literacy the student has (if the student has had education in his/her home country); and whether the student’s academic language progress is commensurate with his progress in the ESL class. As always, it is imperative that you confer with the ESL teacher to find out about where the student should be with social and academic language.
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When are ESL department members available for parent/teacher conferences to translate? / How do you communicate with parents who cannot speak English?

Members of the ESL department are happy to help with translation and interpreting by appointment. If you have bilingual ESL teachers at your school who have offered translation and interpreting services, please make sure you schedule an appointment in advance with the teacher to make sure that the appointment does not interrupt instructional time. For further guidance on how to secure a system translator and the protocol for requesting translating/interpreting services, please see the ESL Policy Guide under the section entitled Home-School Communication. Many other bilingual teachers are often willing to help translate/interpret as needed. Find out who they are. Finally, several ready-made guides exist that can help you write simple notes to parents. ESL teachers often have access to such lists and guides, which they sometimes provide to parents as well.

Can I expect my ESL students to do the same work as my other students?

Yes and no. You can expect your LEP students to learn the same content and concepts as the other students, however, according to the student’s proficiency in English, you may have to modify assignments and instruction so that the content and concepts are accessible to the student while they are learning English. The greater the English proficiency, the less you will have to modify/accommodate for the language barrier. Students with less English proficiency will need more modification and accommodation in instruction, assignment and assessment in order to learn the concepts and to demonstrate what they have learned to you.

What are the most beneficial modifications for ESL students? / How do we deal with students who are ELL but don’t receive ESL support due to scheduling?

Many different instructional strategies and modifications are effective with English language learners in general. The most effective modifications will be the ones that you choose to use based on the individual student’s need. A list of modifications commonly used to help students access academic content can be found here:

http://esl.lee.schoolfusion.us/modules/locker/files/get_group_file.phtml?gid=1205946&fid=7556393&sessionid=c81ac1db753a1df45e772ab8b64fde4f

To maximize the success of these modifications it is also recommended that teachers utilize the SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) to help create lesson plans that consider the language needs of students in the class. FAQs and more information on the SIOP model of instruction can be found here http://www.cal.org/siop/resources/faqs.html.

When is Rosetta Stone going to be available?

Rosetta Stone is computer-based language learning program. The Office of Special Programs currently has no plans to purchase this software. Other departments may be in discussions for a possible use for Rosetta Stone within our schools. The best way to learn a new language is to find a great language instructor and plenty of people with whom to practice.

What percentage of ESL students have parents who speak English in Lee County?

This question requires a little research to get the exact numbers. What we do know is that many younger parents, particularly those in their 20s have been living in the United States for a number of years or were born here and are proficient or fluent English speakers. Many more parents of all ages have varying degrees of English proficiency. Some have just begun to learn since they are new arrivals to the country, some are more advanced and some have achieved proficiency and are bilingual.

Is pullout ESL instruction more effective than ESL support within the regular classroom?

It depends. If there is a strong co-teaching relationship between the ESL teacher and the regular classroom teacher where the two teachers plan together and deliver instruction together, taking equal responsibility for the language learning and
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academic advancement of all students in the class then co-teaching has a positive effect on student learning. However, an ESL teacher serving as an assistant or a tutor within the classroom is not an effective way to deliver language support and instruction. Many ESL students are pulled out of class for intensive language instruction that normally would not occur in a classroom where everyone already speaks English.

How can we ensure that the ESL classes are covering all subject areas?

Talk to your ESL teacher and establish some form of communication and collaboration. ESL teachers use the WIDA standards—which emphasizes academic language learning in each of the four major content areas, to plan instruction. It is not expected that ESL teachers will teach all the content from all subject areas. ESL teachers teach the social and academic language necessary for students to enter content classrooms and be able to function. As can be imagined, it would be impossible for an ESL teacher to be able to plan with every content teacher in every subject at every grade level (some ESL teachers teach six different grade levels in one day). Academic language learning is very much a joint effort between the content teacher and the ESL teacher. Share the major topics and skills in the content areas with the ESL teacher, who will help support academic learning by pulling out and teaching the language concepts and structures that the students need to perform within the content area.

Why is ESL during BUZZ time?

All scheduling decisions are made at the discretion of the school’s principal. In many elementary schools, intervention time (each school has a different name for it, such as BUZZ) is the only regularly scheduled time for students to receive support services such as E.C., ESL, speech, AIG, tutoring, etc. However, some schools are more flexible in how they have scheduled services for students with particular academic needs. For example, in some schools, students who are brand new to the country are allowed to attend ESL classes for a greater portion of the day.

What are some strategies for communication when the teacher does not speak the students’ native language?

There are many things that you can do to bridge the language gap. One of the easiest things to do is to get a bilingual student to serve as a buddy to the student. The buddy would help the non-English speaking student to understand your directions and instruction. The buddy would also need to be changed periodically so that his/her own academics do not suffer for trying to help a fellow student (and the teacher). Another good way to facilitate communication is through using body language (act it out), pictures or visual aids and by using simple, straightforward English spoken in a natural voice but at a slower rate. Often a student will understand more English than he/she can produce. The most important thing to remember is that it is extremely important to communicate with the student, even if not everything you say is understood. Engaging the student will help you build a relationship so that the student feels protected and will be more willing to try to use the English he/she is learning. Keeping a Spanish-English dictionary on hand for your own reference as well as the student’s never hurt either.

What are some good web-based resources (student-friendly)?

There is a good list of websites on Lee County Schools’ ESL website in the “Resources for ESL Teachers” folder. http://tinyurl.com/2unxjijg Other good sites include:

http://larryferlazzo.com/ Has a wide variety of resources for ELL students in various content areas. Created by a teacher.

http://www.eslcafe.com/students/ Focuses mainly on language skills.

http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/student-interactives/ Interactive literacy tools.

What are a few teaching strategies for a high school student who is EC and has low English language?

This is a very complex issue. The link below leads to a paper by Robin Schwarz, a researcher who has studied, written and taught about the ways in which being LEP and LD affect each other. The article is long, but pages 24-30 contain valuable strategies (they are bulleted) for working with older LEP/EC students.
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