

# **OLR Backgrounder: English Learner Identification and Education Programs in Public Schools**

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## **Issues**

How do Connecticut public schools identify students who are English learners (EL)? What is the difference between bilingual education programs and English as a second language (ESL) programs?

## **Summary**

As defined in the [Connecticut English Language Proficiency \(CELP\) Standards Glossary of Terms](#) adopted by the State Board of Education (SBE), an “English learner” is a “student who is learning English as an additional language and who has been determined to be limited English proficient through a home language survey and standardized language assessment measures; may also be referred to as English language learner (ELL), non-native speaker (NNS), or Limited English Proficient (LEP).”

The State Department of Education (SDE) has a process that public school districts must follow to identify English learners enrolled in grades kindergarten through 12 (K-12). For districts that offer public preschool for four- and five-year-olds, SDE has established an optional identification process to follow.

State law requires public school districts to offer bilingual education programs when there is a threshold population of enrolled students who speak the same language and are identified as EL. Bilingual education programs are taught in both the student’s primary language and English. English as a second language (ESL) programs are taught exclusively in English and are available to

students identified as EL or EL students who have reached their maximum enrollment period in bilingual education.

## **EL Student Identification**

### ***Grades K-12***

In 2019, SDE updated the [English Learner Identification Process](#) that districts must follow to identify K-12 students as ELs beginning in the 2019-20 school year. It consists of the following steps:

1. The student completes the Home Language Survey (HLS) (which is only required if the student is enrolling in a Connecticut public school for the first time; if transferring between Connecticut public school districts, the student does not have to complete it again).
2. The district reviews the HLS results to see if they indicate that the student has a primary or home language other than English (PHLOTE) and may be an EL.
3. If the survey indicates the student may have a PHLOTE, the district administers the approved English language proficiency (ELP) assessment (i.e., the LAS Links Placement 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition in English that corresponds to the student's grade level; kindergarten students also have the option to take the preLAS 2000 English version instead).
4. If the student's score on the ELP assessment shows that he or she is an EL, then the district informs the parents of the service options for their child, and they either (a) select the service the student will receive or (b) waive services. The district also informs them that they may modify their selection at any time.

### ***Grade PreK-4***

In 2018, SDE established the recommended [Optional English Learner Identification Process Flowchart for PK-4](#) that districts may choose to use beginning in the 2018-19 school year. (There is no requirement, however, that districts identify preschool students as EL.) The process consists of the following steps:

1. The student, who is at least four years old, completes the HLS beginning in November of the school year.
2. The district reviews the HLS results to see if it indicates that the student has a primary or home language other than English (PHLOTE) and may be an EL.
3. If the survey indicates the student may have a PHLOTE, the district administers the approved English language proficiency (ELP) assessment (i.e., the preLAS 2000 English version).
4. If the student's score on the preLAS 2000 is lower than Level 4 or 5, then he or she is identified as EL.

## **EL Educational Programs**

The Connecticut State Board of Education (SBE) explains in its 2010 “[Position Statement on the Education of Students Who Are English Language Learners](#)” that “high-quality, comprehensive and effective English as a Second Language (ESL) and bilingual education programs are essential to acquire English language proficiency and academic proficiency for students who are English Language Learners.”

### ***Required Bilingual Education Programs***

A bilingual education program is an academic program taught in both English and the student’s native language. Connecticut law requires schools to provide bilingual programs in schools that have 20 or more speakers of the same native language who are identified as EL. School boards must determine the number of eligible students annually ([CGS § 10-17f\(a\)-\(b\)](#)).

Characteristics of a bilingual education program include the following:

1. enables students to achieve English proficiency and academic mastery of subject matter content and higher order skills, including critical thinking, in order to meet appropriate grade promotion and graduation requirements and
2. provides instruction that continuously increases the use of English and the corresponding decrease in the use of the students’ native language within one school year and from year to year, including instruction in English more than half the time by the end of the students’ first year.

Additionally, bilingual programs may (1) develop students’ native language skills and (2) include English-proficient students, if the program is designed to enable all enrolled students to become more proficient in English and a second language ([CGS § 10-17e\(2\)](#)).

By law, students may not remain enrolled in bilingual education for more than 30 months (although the months do not have to be consecutive). The law allows extended enrollment through summer school, a two-way language program, or, if SDE determines it is necessary for the student, an additional 30 months in a bilingual program. If the student does not meet the English mastery standard after the first 30 months in the program or any extension, then the school board must provide language transition and academic support services, which may include, among other things, enrollment in an ESL program ([CGS § 10-17f\(d\)](#)).

### ***Optional Bilingual Educational Programs***

Any local or regional board of education may choose to establish a bilingual and bicultural program involving a culture in which a language other than English is predominantly spoken, regardless of the number of native language speakers enrolled in its public schools ([CGS § 10-17a](#)).

## ***ESL Programs***

Under state law, an ESL program delivers instruction exclusively in English and enables students to achieve English proficiency and academic mastery of subject matter content and higher order skills, including critical thinking, to meet appropriate grade promotion and graduation requirements ([CGS § 10-17e\(3\)](#)).

SBE's "[Position Statement on the Education of Students Who Are English Language Learners](#)" describes the methods and goals of SBE-endorsed ESL programs, which include, among other things:

1. helping ELs acquire a level of English proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing that will allow them to master the same content and meet the same academic performance standards expected of students whose first language is English and
2. recognizing native languages as assets that enrich lives and may be used to support academic instruction.

## **Hyperlinks**

State Board of Education. "CELP Standards Glossary of Terms." [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/English-Learners/celp\\_standards\\_glossary.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/English-Learners/celp_standards_glossary.pdf). October 7, 2015.

Connecticut State Department of Education. "English Learner Identification Process." <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Student-Assessment/Special-Populations/English-Learner-Identification-Policy-Update-FINAL-7-1-19.pdf?la=en>. July 1, 2019.

Connecticut State Department of Education. "Optional English Learner Identification Process Flowchart for PK-4." <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Student-Assessment/Special-Populations/CSDE-Optional-EL-Identification-Flowchart-for-PK-4-6122018.pdf?la=en>. June 12, 2018.

State Board of Education. "Position Statement on the Education of Students Who Are English Language Learners." <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Board/esl.pdf?la=en>. July 7, 2010.

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