

Using Distance Learning for English Learner Programming

This document is meant to provide clarity regarding expectations for districts and charter schools when using distance learning for English learner (EL) programming. It is intended for use by all staff providing and/or coordinating English language development and academic content instruction for students with EL status. Please refer to the [Commissioner's School Closure guidance document](#) for general distance-learning guidance.

English Learner Programming and Equity

It is important to remember that providing service to students identified as English learners is a matter of equity. There are a number of state and federal laws that clarify the legal and ethical responsibility for districts and charter schools to provide both access to academic content and facilitate student progress towards English language proficiency (ELP). [See the U. S. Department of Education Civil Rights Obligations.](#)

Providing Service to Students Identified as English Learners

"The school district remains responsible for educating English learners" (March 18, 2020 Commissioner's School Closure Guidance for District and Charter Schools)

Districts and charter schools need to adapt their language instruction educational program (LIEP) plan to account for distance learning. For example, minutes of service may be replaced by differentiated English language development (ELD) instruction that includes student contact times (e.g., once or twice per week via Skype-to-phone calls) and types of supports (e.g., Google document with a list of steps in a project-based learning plan including hotlinks). [See the Resources section for examples adapted from districts.](#)

Districts and charter schools must continue to provide in writing how English language development services will be provided to English learners. This can be in the form of an appendix to the current LIEP plan. This appendix should include the amount and scope/type of distance service for stand-alone ELD instruction, co-taught or collaborative ELD instruction, and mainstream classes (i.e., how EL supports will be provided). Service and support should be differentiated by ELP to account for beginning, intermediate, and advanced ELP at each grade level. Instruction should address ELs' needs in each language domain (reading, writing, listening and speaking).

The district or charter school should also clarify how it will communicate the information in the adapted LIEP plan with families. In summary, the "Distance Learning LIEP plan appendix" must include:

- The amount and scope of ELD instruction
- How EL supports will be provided in mainstream instruction
- The way that the appendix will be communicated to families

Consider collecting input on the appendix from stakeholders including students, EL teachers, mainstream teachers, parents, and bilingual support staff. [See the Resources section for examples adapted from districts.](#)

Student Contact Expectations

“Immediate considerations for English learners include access to a reliable internet connection” (March 18, 2020, Commissioner’s School Closure Guidance for District and Charter Schools)

All teachers working with students identified for EL support should assume that students do not have access to reliable internet service even if provided by the district or municipal government. It is recommended that teachers provide options for students that can be accessed by a variety of methods including cell phones.

“Distance Learning defined: Students engaging in distance learning have access to appropriate educational materials and receive daily interaction with their licensed teacher(s)” (March 18, 2020, Commissioner’s School Closure Guidance for District and Charter Schools)

Districts and charter schools should have clear expectations for student contact with the EL teacher. This student contact time (one-on-one or in a small group) should be used for conferring, providing feedback, setting individual learning goals, and/or checking on progress.

English Language Development (ELD) Expectations

“Districts and charters must plan how they will continue to meet English learners’ educational needs” (March 18, 2020, Commissioner’s School Closure Guidance for District and Charter Schools).

EL teachers need to provide options to students for English language development instruction that is additional to mainstream instruction. This additional instruction should provide opportunities for students to grow in their English language proficiency. Language instruction ideally would be aligned to grade level standards and embedded in long-term learning projects to avoid random, non-aligned “busy work.”

“To the extent possible, service should reflect the language proficiency levels of the students” (March 18, 2020 Commissioner’s School Closure Guidance for District and Charter Schools).

Students who are at a beginning proficiency level in English should receive more contact time and have more options for support than students at intermediate and advanced levels. Consider also how ELD instruction provides access to grade-level content academic standards, and how a student’s grade level informs the amount of ELD instruction is necessary (e.g., a beginning level ELP kindergartener’s needs differ from those of a 6th or 11th grader’s needs). Additionally, ensure content teachers are well-prepared to support ELs’ needs.

“Collaboration between English language development teachers and academic content teachers is still encouraged” (March 18, 2020 Commissioner’s School Closure Guidance for District and Charter Schools).

EL teachers are expected to have regularly scheduled times to collaborate with mainstream teachers. The amount and frequency of the collaboration will depend on the planned instructional models (e.g., co-taught instruction would require more time for co-planning). However, all teachers of students with English learner status should collaborate with an EL teacher to ensure effective instruction for English learners.

Supports in Mainstream Instruction for Students Identified for EL Support

“By law, students who are identified to receive English language development services must be provided supports that allow them access to academic content” (March 18, 2020, Commissioner’s School Closure Guidance for District and Charter Schools).

All mainstream teachers must clearly identify how they are providing supports in their distance learning for students identified EL. These supports should address all four domains (i.e., reading, writing, listening and speaking), but specifically include plans for scaffolding and providing feedback on student writing and speaking, whenever possible. These supports can be identified in planning documents or on instructional materials such as project guidelines, rubrics, and graphic organizers.

Expectations for student work should be differentiated based on proficiency level, grade level and personal differences (e.g., background knowledge, home language literacy, interest, individual learning program (IEP), students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) status, etc.).

“Regarding content instruction, English learners still need to have access to core content instruction from a teacher licensed in that content area” (March 18, 2020, Commissioner’s School Closure Guidance for District and Charter Schools).

Mainstream/content teachers have to have a plan for student contact to confer, provide feedback, set goals, and check progress of students.

Monitoring Students Exited from EL Status

Districts and charter schools must continue to monitor students who have exited EL programming within the past two years. Mainstream staff have the primary responsibility for students exited from EL status and must monitor their academic progress as well as provide any needed instructional supports.

Communicating with Students and Families

“Immediate considerations for English learners include communication with families that may not speak English as a primary language” (March 18, 2020, Commissioner’s School Closure Guidance for District and Charter Schools).

Districts and charter schools should be proactive in communicating specifically with multilingual communities. It is not sufficient to send out a generic email or robo-call without following up to ensure families received the message, and it was understood. In addition, districts and charter schools must send out information to families in their preferred language(s) and have clear outreach strategies that include connecting with multilingual, multicultural families and community organizations through bilingual staff, community elders, and planned calling trees. Refer to the [Commissioner’s guidance document](#) for more information about communication.

Frequently Asked Questions

May districts and charter schools cancel EL services during distance learning?

No. Instruction for English learners must continue to be provided in order to both increase proficiency in English (and native language, when possible) and provide access to the same challenging content and standards all other students are expected to meet.

Do we need to follow our district's LIEP plan during distance learning?

During distance learning, it is expected that districts and charter schools will adjust their LIEP plan to support learning in the new context. As stated in the guidance, instruction should be determined based on proficiency level, grade level and needs in each language domain (reading, writing, listening and speaking). The district or charter school should have a revised plan available to parents upon request. Given the short timeframe in which development can take place, districts and charters are not expected to rewrite a new LIEP but to develop an appendix that addresses any sections impacted by distance learning.

Who can serve as an interpreter when communicating with families?

In distance and in face-to-face learning, only certified interpreters are appropriate for transmitting or discussing personal student information or data. Siblings and neighbors are not appropriate interpreters of personal student information as using them compromises the family's and student's civil right to privacy and does not ensure accuracy of information due to use of education terminology with which family members may not be familiar.

What are MDE's expectations for serving students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) during distance learning?

Ensuring equitable education for all students is essential as schools develop distance-learning plans. When educating SLIFE, ensure instruction includes basic school-readiness and school culture skills and additional distance-learning norms and scaffolds to ensure access to English language development and academic content standards. Many SLIFE also have needs for meals once provided by schools and may have a more difficult time accessing the information due to language access needs. Thus, it is important that educators work to reach out to SLIFE and their families to ensure students have the same access and information as all students.

Resources

MDE will continue to add resources as we receive them in a shareable format. Thank you to districts for sharing your distance-learning documents for ELD and integrated EL instruction. If you have additional documents that would be useful to others, please send to [Amy Young](#) or [Julie Chi](#).

[WIDA Teaching EL Online Resources](#)

[Community and School Resources - Minnesota Department of Health COVID-19 page](#) includes [health care resources](#) telling how to access health insurance and low-cost clinics, downloadable posters, videos and materials on [hand hygiene](#) in multiple languages, and a [COVID-19 Anti-Discrimination flier](#), which shares a basic message that people should not discriminate against anyone due to fear of COVID-19. MDH wants to make sure Minnesotans of Asian descent and others do not experience discrimination or barriers to service or care. If you believe you have been discriminated against, contact the Minnesota Department of Human Rights at 651-539-1133 to speak with an investigator. The entire process is free. Interpretation and translation services are available.

Examples for LIEP Plan Distance Learning Appendix

Example 1:

| Goal | Description | Contact for Information |
|--|---|-------------------------|
| ELD Instruction (What will EL teachers do?) | <p>For Elementary:</p> <p>EL level 1 to 2.5 - EL students get core instruction from classroom teachers. EL services are carried out through monitoring of Imagine Learning hours. Hold virtual google hangout once a week with all students to provide oral language development (All EL can join but this is specifically to help beginning level students)</p> <p>EL 2.6 to 3.5 - EL teachers will do videos to link to the main lessons of the classroom teachers. At this level, the teachers will be focused on linking vocabulary support and comprehension skills.</p> <p>EL 3.6 to 4.5 - EL teachers co-teach at this level. Support for students will depend on modification of assignments with the content teachers.</p> <p>All videos for the intermediate levels will be accessible to all students. However, the targeted purpose will meet the needs of the specific language development focus for intermediate students.</p> | EL Coordinator |

| Goal | Description | Contact for Information |
|--|--|--------------------------------|
| ELD Instruction (What will EL teachers do?) | <p>For Secondary:</p> <p>EL Pullout using INSIDE or EDGE and EL Push-in to pre-teach content curriculum - EL teachers will record lessons and assignments that EL students will complete and submit back to teachers.</p> <p>EL Co-taught - EL teachers plan with mainstream teachers and provide modification to the lessons needed for EL students.</p> <p>Support Staff</p> | EL Coordinator |
| Mainstream EL Support (What will content teachers do to support English learners?) | Mainstream teachers will meet with EL teachers at least once a week. | Building Principal |
| Communicating with Multilingual/Multicultural Families | Paras, liaisons, and volunteers will be available contact families weekly and be available for students to meet virtually with and act as tutors daily. | EL Coordinator |

Example 2

| Goal | Description | Contact for Information |
|---|---|---------------------------|
| <p>ELD Instruction (What will EL teachers do?)</p> | <p>Language development will be addressed within grade level content-aligned lessons through EL services according to proficiency level. Feedback provided as needed to support growth.</p> <p>Beginners: Alternative academic tasks that are appropriate for beginning proficiency levels by grade will be developed.</p> <p>Intermediate: Focus on a repetitive tasks or learning formats to simplify EL student access to learning based on grade level.</p> <p>Advanced: Resources and guidance will be available on the Distance Learning resource page; writing and speaking aligned with content.</p> | <p>EL Coordinator</p> |
| <p>Mainstream EL Support (What will content teachers do to support English learners?)</p> | <p>Support is available to assist teachers in creating accessible distance-learning activities for ELs.</p> <p>Digital platforms will emphasize oral language development.</p> <p>Paper-based learning activities will have differentiated activities for content background knowledge and language proficiency.</p> <p>All staff will have access to a Zoom EL Distance Learning training.</p> | <p>EL Coordinator</p> |
| <p>Communicating with Multilingual/Multicultural Families</p> | <p>Dialog One is available for recording bilingual messages for families.</p> | <p>Equity Coordinator</p> |

Example 3

| Goal | Description | Contact for Information |
|--|---|-------------------------|
| <p>ELD Instruction (What will EL teachers do?)</p> | <p>The following are requirements of continued EL service during the Spring of 2020:</p> <p>K-5 EL Teachers create a Learning Choice Menu for their students for each week of distance learning. These activities can be differentiated within the options themselves or among different options.</p> <p>The four domains of language should be represented within the activities on the board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening: Students can listen to e-books on Benchmark, PebbleGo, and other platforms. They can listen to videos on BrainPop (username: MPLS, password: school1), Culture Grams, and other platforms. • Reading: Students can read books on Benchmark, PebbleGo, and other platforms. • Speaking: Students can record their ideas on Flipgrid using their MPS account, talk with you on the phone, present to their family members, etc. • Writing: Students can type in a Google doc, write and read it aloud to you or a family member, etc. <p>Note on Resources: As distance learning progresses, we will create a sharing platform for additional ideas and resources to be generated differentiated by proficiency level. The platform will be shared here once up and running.</p> | <p>EL Coordinator</p> |
| <p>ELD Instruction (What will EL teachers do?)</p> | <p>6-12 EL Teachers create Google Classrooms for each stand-alone Focus Language Study Class (ELD, ALD, ESL, etc).</p> <p>The four domains of language should be represented within the activities on the board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening: Students can listen to e-books on RazKids, PebbleGo, and other platforms. They can listen to videos on BrainPop, Culture Grams, and other platforms. Podcasts are also a great resource. • Reading: Students can read books and articles on NewsELA, Razkids, PebbleGo, and other platforms. Can assign Learning and Science A-Z articles to students. • Speaking: Students can record their ideas on Flipgrid, talk with you on the phone, present to a “technology buddy,” etc. • Writing: Students type in Google doc posted to Google Classroom <p>Note on Resources: As distance learning progresses, we will expand initial Google Classrooms for teachers to share additional ideas and resources that will be generated. The platform will be shared here once up and running.</p> | <p>EL Coordinator</p> |

| Goal | Description | Contact for Information |
|--|---|----------------------------|
| Mainstream EL Support (What will content teachers do to support English learners?) | <p>ALL Teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to meet virtually with special education case managers to complete Dual Eligible Collaboration tool for all English learners. Students with upcoming IEPs must be prioritized. • Collaborate with Special education teachers to collaborate on learning structures that meet individual student and family needs. <p>EL Teachers need to ensure consistent collaboration with classroom and content colleagues. This includes, but is not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiating materials for various lessons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Providing language structures for students to meet grade level ○ Creating materials for various options to complete assignments ○ Generating visuals to accompany lessons ○ Adding in other virtual platforms to support student learning • Co-planning by utilizing long-term planning resources to map out standards and lessons <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Providing various questions at the key use zones of Recount, Explain, and Analyze aligned with standards, units, and individual lessons ○ Keeping logs and planning documents of meetings together to inform continued collaboration | Building Principals |
| Communicating with Multilingual/Multicultural Families | Cultural liaisons will communicate daily with families by phone. Information will also be delivered to families in writing in a variety of languages when families access food services. | Family liaison coordinator |

Examples adapted from examples shared by Faribault, Roseville, and Minneapolis Public Schools.

Conclusion

As you work to transfer EL instruction to distance learning, it is important to remember that [research shows](#) all students prefer to interact with human beings during the distance-learning process. Teachers can arrange “technology buddies” and integrate creativity into distance learning with role playing games, simulations, case studies, debates, group projects, and experiments. Remember to let students explore and create. That is what has motivated human beings as learners since the beginning of time.

Also, be careful to not overwhelm students with having to learn too much new technology. Ideally, your teaching team can agree to start with one or two platforms and online programs.

Good luck as you learn how to transfer EL programming into distance learning, and thank you for your leadership for multilingual learners in Minnesota!

For specific question about EL programming, please contact: MDE.el@state.mn.us.

Refer to the MDE [COVID-19 Updates](#) webpage for updated guidance.