

## Frequently Asked Questions

### COVID-19 and English Learner and Immigrant Students

In response to the rapidly changing needs of Tennessee local education agencies (LEAs), schools, and students due to COVID-19, the following guidance is meant to assist LEAs with identifying and serving English learners (ELs) and immigrant students. Guidance from the U.S. Department of Education or the Tennessee Department of Education may change over time and will be updated as needed.

**1. *Are LEAs required to identify English learner and immigrant students when schools are not in session?***

Yes. ELs and immigrant students must have equal access to any educational opportunities offered to the general student population. Because English as a second language (ESL) services can only be provided once students are identified as qualifying for services, LEAs who continue to serve students during school closures should continue to identify EL and immigrant students. Each LEA should follow its regular protocols for identifying and enrolling ELs and immigrant students. Generally, the identification process takes place during the enrollment period. During this time of extended school closures, LEAs must provide alternate methods for the identification of potential ELs and immigrant students. The *Home Language Survey* may be administered via mail, over the phone, or virtually through email, online surveys, or teleconferencing platforms, so long as the online platforms are FERPA compliant. Further information about EL identification will be released in the coming weeks. ELs must be identified and parental consent must be obtained before ESL services begin.

**2. *Are LEAs required to screen potential English learners when schools are not in session?***

Screening is a required prerequisite for ESL services. If an LEA will be providing ESL services to ELs, all potential ELs must be screened. If possible, LEAs may administer the screener through a FERPA compliant online platform. LEAs or families not equipped to use the online platform while school is not in session may use alternate screening tools. Further guidance on acceptable alternate screening tools will be provided in the coming weeks.

**3. *How do we enroll students when school is closed?***

LEAs should enroll ELs through the same process used for all other students during this period and should be aware of potential barriers to enrollment and take measures to mitigate them. If services to other students are being provided, ESL services must be provided for eligible students after enrollment. LEAs should still complete the coding process for students in their respective student information systems.

**4. *Who should be responsible for communication with English learners and Limited English Proficient (LEP) families?***

LEAs should identify an appropriate point of contact for communication with LEP families to provide updates on school operations, resources, and COVID-19 guidance and information, as required by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. LEAs should proactively contact students and their families to ensure they can participate in any school-provided instruction and other school and/or community-based supports as needed and appropriate.

**5. How can schools and communities work together to ensure access to virtual or distance learning opportunities for English learners while schools are not in session?**

LEAs must be in contact with families to assess technological needs and requirements for full participation in virtual or distance learning. LEAs should reference the [School Closure Toolkit: Special Populations](#) developed by the department.

**6. How can Title III funds be used to support English learners while schools are not in session?**

Prior to LEA decisions related to Title III budgeting, it is important to consider the following:

- The rules of supplement, not supplant still apply to purchases made with Title III funds during this period.
- The allowability of purchases must still be determined prior to spending.
- The three major buckets of Title III still apply. All purchases must fall within one of the three Title III categories: parent engagement, professional development, and improving instruction.
- Any new inventory purchased must be documented.
- Accessibility for students must be a focus. This includes accessibility across language proficiency and age-appropriate standards.
- Supports should be provided in a language and manner accessible for children and families, to the extent practicable.
- If an EL has an individualized education program (IEP) or is suspected of having a disability, IDEA requirements must still be met.
- There are free virtual resources related to professional development focused on ESL instruction, such as WIDA eLearning. These can be used with both ESL and general education teachers.
- Networks to identify free ESL-related resources exist. Examples include:
  - [Colorin' Colorado](#)
  - [TNESOL](#)
  - [TESOL](#)
  - [FreeESLMaterials.com](#)
  - [ESL Galaxy](#)
  - [WIDA](#)

Purchases related to **family engagement**<sup>i</sup> could include, but are not limited to, the following:

- tools or services to help parents assist their children in their virtual education;
- tools or services to help parents navigate the community resources and systems available to assist with changes related to COVID-19; and
- tools or services to assist in communication with families, such as:
  - [Microsoft Immersive Reader](#) - a free tool available through Microsoft office to help support reading and writing for students. Embedded features like dictation and read-aloud allow students to be able to listen to their work to help support making edits and revisions.
  - [Talking Points](#) - provides the capability to reach students' families in home languages to support building partnerships. Talking Points is offering free access during the impact of school closures due to COVID-19.
  - [TransPerfect](#) - provides multiple levels of translation service ranging from document translation to support with meetings person-person as well as phone calls.
  - [TransAct](#) - provides translation for parent notifications in accordance with family engagement requirements described in federal guidance.
  - [Tennessee Language Center](#) provides professional translators and interpreters to assist in communication through written translation and interpretation of telephone in in-person meetings.

Purchases related to **professional development** could include, but are not limited to, the following:

- online professional development tools focused on best practices in virtual ESL education;
- online professional development tools focused on adapting virtual education and accommodations for ELs in content instruction; and
- equitable opportunities for all educators (including ESL educators) to participate in upcoming literacy training.

Purchases related to **improving ESL instruction** could include, but are not limited to, the following:

- resources to transition individualized learning plans (ILPs) to an online platform;
- virtual ESL instruction tools;
- virtual instructional tools for accommodating classroom instruction for ELs; and
- resources to incorporate ESL supports into the high-quality instructional materials selected by the LEA.

#### **7. Where can LEAs find more information?**

For further information around Tennessee-specific guidance, LEAs can reference the department's [Update on Coronavirus](#) web page. For general information around ESL instruction and supports, LEAs can reference the [U.S. Department of Education's English Learner Toolkit](#).

#### **8. Who can LEAs reach out to with any questions, concerns, or for more guidance?**

Please contact **Jan Lanier**, Director of English Learner and Migrant Programs at [Jan.Lanier@tn.gov](mailto:Jan.Lanier@tn.gov).

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<sup>i</sup> All Title III supplement, not supplant requirements apply, including rules around required parent and family engagement.