

## Questions Teachers Must Answer for ELL Parents

1. *Q: "What language instruction programs does your school offer?"*

A: The answer will vary by school or district, but all teachers should be able to answer this question on a basic level (i.e., name the different instruction programs offered). If necessary, the answer may involve directing parents to other individuals who can provide more in-depth responses.

2. *Q: "Why should I allow my child to participate in the school's language instruction program?"*

A: If a student has been recommended for language support services, it is because testing instruments (and possibly other academic information) have detected that the individual may face linguistic barriers that could prevent him or her from accessing academic content and meeting the high standards set for all students. Participation in a language instruction program should help enrolled students overcome linguistic barriers and attain academic success.

3. *Q: "Why does my child have to take the English language proficiency assessment, even if he or she is not receiving services?"*

A: One of NCLB's performance goals is for all students of limited English proficiency to become proficient in English. In order to measure progress towards the goal, all students identified as ELs also must annually take the statewide ELPA to determine how many students have attained proficiency. Thus, any student identified as an EL must continue to take the ELPA until he or she attains proficiency, according to federal law.

4. *Q: "How can I get more involved with planning and programs at my child's school?"*

A: The answer will vary by district, but LEA's should inform parents of any committees, clubs, activities or workshops in which parents may participate at the school or district level. If appropriate, consider encouraging parents to spearhead participation efforts if there are activities they would like to see at the child's school that do not currently exist.

5. *Q: "What can I do to help my child in his or her acquisition of English?"*

A: Answers to this question can vary considerably depending on the school's own efforts, community resources and parents' English proficiency, but at a minimum parents may support their child's English acquisition by exposing children to English as often as possible and encouraging them to use and practice their English by, for example, reading English (in books or magazines; a library membership might be appropriate if the family is not in a position to buy materials), listening to English (on the radio or television) and practicing spoken English with parents or English-speaking friends.

Parents who are themselves ELs should consider combining their own English acquisition efforts with those of their child. Even if adult ESL courses are not feasible, educators may encourage the child to “teach” what he or she has learned for the day to his or her parents; doing so may reinforce the student’s own knowledge, bolster confidence and help parents to learn English at the same time.

If parents know no English or are not actively learning English, they still may support their child’s academic pursuits by using their home language—and the school should encourage them to do so. Teachers should never discourage parents from using their native language to

## What all Teachers Must Know About Their ELs

1. *English proficiency level.* What is the student's base level of comfort with the English language? Is English completely new to the student or does he or she possess some foundational skills on which to build?
2. *Participation in language instruction programs.* Does the student receive any language instruction support outside of core content classes? Or is he or she learning English solely through content area instruction?
3. *Formal education background.* What was the student's educational experience prior to enrolling in this school? Has the student had any interruptions in his or her formal education? Has he or she enrolled in an American public school before?
4. *Cultural background.* What factors, if any, about the student's cultural upbringing may impact the way she or he behaves in the classroom? Are there any cultural practices related to communication or interaction that might affect the way the student acts around instructors or other students?
5. *Disabilities –if any.* Does the student have any learning or cognitive disabilities that might affect access to academic content or performance in class?

**See also:** Chapter 5: EL Identification and Placement Requirements; Chapter 6: Curriculum Requirements; Chapter 8: Professional Development.