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ENGLISH LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES: *A Parent Guide*

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naetisl@gmail.com



www.naetisl.org

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English Learners with Disabilities: *A Parent Guide*

Who are English Learners (ELs)?

English Learners are students whose first language is not English and who are developing English language skills while participating in school.

Schools provide language support services to help ELs learn English and succeed in academic subjects.

Can an English Learner also have a disability?

Yes. Some English Learners have disabilities that affect learning, communication, movement, health, vision or hearing, or behavior. These students are sometimes called “dually identified” students because they qualify for both English language support and special education services.

How do schools determine if an English Learner has a disability?

Schools must take special care to separate the effects of limited English proficiency from signs of a possible disability.

Before testing for disability issues, schools:

- Review the student’s language background and progress in English.
- Consider how long the student has received English language instruction.
- Look at the success of instruction in both English and the student’s home language.





If the student struggles in both languages, the school may conduct a special education evaluation in the language or languages the student understands best.

What kinds of evaluations are used?

Evaluations may include:

- Cognitive and academic assessments.
- Speech and language testing (in both languages when possible).
- Classroom observations.
- Input from parents, teachers, and bilingual staff.

All testing must be fair, culturally appropriate, and not biased against students who are English Learners.

What services can a dually identified student receive?

These students may receive:

- English language development (ELD) instruction from an English as a
- Second Language (ESL) or a bilingual teacher.
- Special education services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, or specialized instruction.
- Accommodations such as extra time, visual supports, or bilingual aides.

The IEP team, including parents, makes decisions about what ELD and special education services the student will receive and how the services will be delivered. Both sets of services must be coordinated so the student can learn effectively in both areas.





Who is responsible for providing these services?

The special education team and the English Learner program staff share responsibility.

They work together to plan and deliver instruction that supports both language learning and the student's individual learning needs.

What is the parent's role?

Parents play an important part in:

- Sharing information about their child's language background and strengths.
- Participating in IEP (Individualized Education Program) meetings.
- Asking questions and expressing their views about services and goals.
- Supporting learning in the home language as well as in English — both languages are valuable!

What is included in an IEP for an English Learner?

The IEP should:

- Describe how the student's language needs affect participation in instruction.
- Include goals for both language development and academic progress.
- Specify how services will be provided and by whom.
- State how the school will measure progress and communicate it to families.





What if parents need information in their home language?

Schools must provide interpreters for meetings and translated documents (such as IEPs, evaluation reports, and notices) in the family's preferred language whenever possible.

Parents have the right to understand and participate fully in decisions about their child.

How can parents support their child at home?

- Continue to use and develop the home language — it helps with English learning.
- Communicate regularly with teachers and specialists.
- Encourage reading, talking, and learning in both languages.
- Celebrate progress in small steps — language and learning growth take time.

What rights do English Learners with disabilities and their parents have?

Students and parents have all rights under:

- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) — which ensures special education services.
- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) — which guarantee language access and equal educational opportunities.

Schools must make sure students are not denied services in one area because of the other.



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Still have questions?

Talk to your school's special education coordinator, English language coordinator, or principal. You can also contact your state's Parent Training and Information Center (PTI) for free support.

How can I get help in my language?

Request interpreter services at your child's school or the school district's office. Request translated written information if needed. Information available to all parents in the school district should be available to you as well.



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