



Starting Well 2020: Addressing the needs of English learners

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This document is to be used in conjunction with guidance available on the South Dakota Department of Education's [Starting Well webpage](#).

Introduction

As schools prepare for the 2020-21 school year, it is important to remember that the language barrier facing English learners and their families may present unique challenges during distance or hybrid learning. This guide addresses considerations for schools in working with EL students and families, especially if local conditions warrant the use of distance or hybrid learning models.

Schools continue to be responsible for serving EL students' needs in both content instruction and English language development, whether instruction is provided face-to-face, through distance learning, or a hybrid model. Find more information on school district obligations on the South Dakota Department of Education's [Title III: English Language Acquisition webpage](#) and in this [Fact Sheet: Providing services to English learners during the COVID-19 outbreak](#).

Please note: This document references several resources to support educators who may need to navigate among different instructional models (face-to-face, distance, hybrid) during school year 2020-21 due to COVID-19. **The South Dakota Department of Education is not endorsing any of the listed resources from outside the department nor has the department thoroughly vetted them for alignment to content standards.** Schools and teachers should review the resources carefully to determine if they are appropriate.

Acronyms used in this document

EL: English learner

ELD: English language development

ELP: English language proficiency

ESL: English as a second language

LAP: Language acquisition plan

LMS: Learning management system

WIDA: Consortium dedicated to EL instruction

School Enrollment and Identification Procedures

Face-to-face:

The identification process for identifying English learners remains the same for the 2020-21 school year and includes the administration of one of the WIDA screeners: Kindergarten W-APT or Grades 1-12 WIDA Screener. For more information on the identification process, please visit the [English learners in South Dakota Identification Manual](#) and [Enrolling First-Time South Dakota Students Quick Reference](#).

In case of a school closure:

If a school is closed due to COVID-19, the school should follow the following process for identifying a potential EL student:

- 1) Student is enrolled.
- 2) District receives a home language survey that indicates a student may be an EL.
- 3) District conducts WIDA Remote Screener with student by phone.
- 4) If WIDA Remote Screener results indicate student provisionally qualifies as an EL, the school should NOT create an EL record in Infinite Campus at the state level, but should create an EL flag in the district Infinite Campus edition.
- 5) District notifies parents of eligibility for EL services.
- 6) District notifies student's teachers of provisional EL identification and placement. Begin EL services.
- 7) As soon as possible, complete formal screening utilizing the WIDA screeners for all students who were provisionally screened.
- 8) If a student qualifies for the EL program per WIDA screeners, formal identification in Infinite Campus will occur.

WIDA Remote Screener is a remotely administered screening tool that supports the identification of ELs in a time of school closures. The assessment is designed specifically to enable screening when the student and test administrator cannot share a physical space. School districts will have access to the following temporary remote screeners:

- WIDA K-1 Remote Screener
- WIDA Grades 2-12 Remote Screener

Students who do not qualify for EL services based on the remote screener should be re-screened with the regular K-WAPT or WIDA screener once the screener can be administered in the school setting.

Remote screeners are available to school districts via the WIDA Secure Portal. For more information about the remote screeners or to obtain a WIDA account, please email DOEAassessment@state.sd.us

In spring 2020, the South Dakota Department of Education and the [South Dakota State-Wide Title III & Migrant Consortia](#) hosted regular collaboration webinars to help teachers of English learners network and share ideas about how they were working with English learners during school closures related to COVID-19. What follows are considerations for educators as they plan for face-to-face learning and potential transitions into and out of distance learning during the 2020-21 school year.

Much of this information is based on lessons learned by the participants of these collaboration webinars and falls into five main categories: family engagement, communication, consistency, English language development, and collaboration.

Family engagement and communication

Connecting with families. ESL teachers play a crucial role in establishing a **strong connection between school and EL families**. During distance learning, content teachers often sought out the district's ESL teacher for assistance in communicating with families or EL students.

Consider holding a "Bring Your Own Device Night" for families. Providing internet access and devices for families is good, but it can be valuable to go a step further. During an event like this, a school district can provide training to families to help familiarize them with the district's learning management systems, communication tools, etc. that a school will be using and expecting parents to engage with. Districts can develop videos, user guides, or flowcharts/tables with step-by-step instructions (in language of preference) and offer explicit modeling of lesson retrieval and assignment submissions with "I do, we do, you do" practice opportunities.

Email messages may not be enough. During distance learning in spring 2020, educators discovered that email was not always the most effective way to communicate with EL families. It is important to ask families about the most effective way to communicate with them and the method they prefer. For instance, some educators found that many families preferred the application **WhatsApp** because they frequently use this app to communicate with family members in their countries of origin, so they were already familiar and comfortable with using it.

Communication goes both ways. It's important to get information out to families, but it's equally important to ensure families know how to engage with that information. Families need to know how to communicate with the district. One school district sent a post card to families with information about a parent survey. QR codes clearly linked to the survey in English, as well as other languages spoken in the district.

Encourage use of the primary home language. English learner students may not have an adult in the home who can support their English language development during distance learning. This is a great time to encourage families to use their native language for oral language development and provide literacy activities in their homes as a school is able. Continued development in the first language aids in learning English.

Consider providing **bilingual books and websites** to encourage these skills. Many teachers also recognized the value of parents understanding that they can help with homework in many ways even if they do not speak English. Some schools have hosted **family nights** to help build parents' skills in helping with homework. For instance, a parent could ask their child to read in English, then discuss the reading in the family's first language.

Home-school liaisons can also play a vital role in communicating with families. While small schools may not have the capacity create liaison programs, some small schools had success with asking a paraprofessional to take on the role of part-time home-school liaison. Families came to trust these para-liaisons because of consistent communication each week.

It can also be valuable to establish **partnerships with employers**. One employer may employ the majority of a district's parents of English learners. For instance, in the Huron School District, a local meat processing plant has run school announcements in their employees' primary language on TV monitors in the break room.

Consistency

As school closures persisted in spring 2020, it became evident that teachers, parents, and students alike wanted and needed a consistent approach to distance teaching and lesson delivery.

Platforms. This may take the form of one platform for the entire district, or one platform per school type (i.e. one for elementary; one for middle/high school). Once a platform is chosen, teach students and families how to use it, whether through face-to-face training, recorded videos, etc.

Instructional delivery and lesson design. Teachers found it useful for their district to create a lesson template that could be utilized across all grade levels and content areas. This created consistency for students and families. It also enabled teachers who taught multiple preps to have a similar approach no matter the course being taught. A suggested template could include four sections:

- 1) Short introduction and objectives (i.e. In this lesson or class you will learn...)
- 2) Content section telling students how they will learn the needed information
- 3) Resources section (i.e. Read this, watch this video, practice on this worksheet)
- 4) Assessment section explaining how students will apply and show what they know about the topic

Many educators came to recognize that less is more, busy work was not beneficial, and learning was made more meaningful with higher order thinking activities and not low-level recall assignments.

Scheduling. Whatever a school/district decides, the priority is consistency once the decision is made. Some educators found it useful to mirror the school's face-to-face schedule with distance learning. So if math was at 9 a.m. face to face, it would be at 9 a.m. during distance learning. Sessions can be recorded and posted for those who need it.

Flexibility in scheduling and deadlines may be necessary as students may have responsibilities to work and/or care for other family members and may not be available during school hours during virtual learning. Some families may be working all week and need the weekend to catch up on coursework.

Consider planning asynchronous chats, discussion boards, and activities so that students can contribute and learn outside traditional school hours. Perhaps make assignments due at the end of a weekend rather than at the end of a school day.

Synchronous and asynchronous learning environments—considerations for ELD lessons. ELD lessons can be delivered synchronously through an online platform or asynchronously through a recording created by the EL teacher and electronically delivered to students and their families in the preferred communication method of the family. ELD lessons can also be prepared and delivered in paper format to students. Simply assigning work is not instruction, so communication with the student should be maintained through phone, email, Zoom, text, app, LMS communication tools, or other personal communication. ELD strategies can be planned and delivered through co-teaching with the classroom or content teacher.

Teachers who reported the most effective lessons were those who were able to connect asynchronous work with synchronous activities on a weekly basis. For example, one teacher used dialogue activities, sending them home via text message on Monday for the student to practice for a couple of days. On Thursday or Friday, the student and teacher would meet via Zoom or talk by phone. They would read the dialogue, work through grammar and content activities found in the dialogue, and the teacher could extend the conversation to challenge the student.

Below is a chart of important considerations for ELs in synchronous and asynchronous learning environments.



Two Types of Cyber Learning Environments for ELs At-A-Glance

Type of Cyber Learning	Definition	Advantages for ELs	Disadvantages for ELs
 <p>Synchronous</p>	<p>Real-time virtual interaction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on oral language skills development through social cues and modeling Interaction with peers and teachers Negotiated meaning opportunities Allows more student-to-student interaction than only student-to-teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pace of conversation and instruction may be too fast for needed processing time Scheduling virtual class time may cause confusion
 <p>Asynchronous</p>	<p>Not-in-real-time virtual interaction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on literacy development Time to process content and respond Time to translate words or phrases Students can repeat videos as needed Students can repeat listening to audio Allows more student-to-teacher interaction for clarification or meeting ELs' needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of social cues and negotiated meaning opportunities that help develop a second or additional language

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Source: Support Ed - [Two Types of Cyber Learning Environments for ELs At-A-Glance](#)

Grading. Grading policy is a local decision. It is important to clearly communicate grading policy with families, so that they understand expectations whether learning is occurring face-to-face or remotely. It is important to remember that during distance learning, many students must take on additional responsibilities, like caring for younger siblings and potentially working/taking on extra shifts. Families may struggle with access to internet and devices. These can be important things to remember when grading student work.

English language development

Educators identified several adjustments to consider with English language development when moving from face-to-face to distance learning:

The four literacy domains: listening, speaking, reading, writing. Distance learning presents unique challenges for providing an appropriate balance of practice in the four domains of ELD. A **Google Slides Hyperdoc** with four quadrants can be a useful way to share a variety of tech tools with students that lend themselves to language practice in each of the four domains. With this tool, a teacher can choose a content topic, noting learning goals and a state content standard. For example, for the topic of the plant life cycle, a student could click a “listen” link to a video, a “speaking” link to a Flipgrid post, a “reading” link to a Newsela article, and a “writing” link to a Google form that asks them to write a short summary.

A Google Slides Hyperdoc could be shared on a Monday with a short, recorded video explaining to students what to do. Then when a class can get together synchronously later in the week, the teacher could lead discussions about the learning from the Google Slides Hyperdoc.

ELD curriculum online components. Some educators discovered valuable online components of their ELD curriculum that they plan to begin incorporating into daily ELD activities this fall as the school year begins face-to-face. Consider creating individual accounts in your ELD curricular online resource for all students. Utilize this resource to enhance speaking, writing, listening, and reading skills in traditional instruction to ease any needed transitions to and from remote learning. During distance learning, educators could assign regular practice opportunities using the ELD curricular online resource to keep students speaking, writing, listening to, and reading English.

Proficiency levels. The distance learning experience caused educators to examine the ways they instructed students at WIDA levels 1-2 versus students who were at WIDA Levels 3-4. For students at levels 1-2, content teachers often deferred to the ESL teacher for instruction. For students at levels 3-4, the content took a “front seat,” and the ESL teacher assisted by suggesting supports, scaffolding activities, and modifications as needed.

For example, one teacher “Zoomed” with her students at levels 1-2 once a week, and they did speaking exercises that she could share on her screen. They focused on the grammar scope and sequence provided in their ELD book, which emphasized oral speaking and listening activities, and incorporated content topics from the appropriate grade level. This same teacher “Zoomed” with her students at levels 3-4 once a week, either individually or in small groups. Time with these students was focused on supporting content homework from a linguistic perspective and relied heavily on supporting the reading and writing domains. Each teacher worked with language development and content topics, but approached it differently, based on students’ WIDA language proficiency levels.

Collaboration

Distance learning challenges during spring 2020 led to valuable new collaborations and recognition of existing collaborations that can continue to pay dividends in the 2020-21 school year and beyond.

Through **collaboration webinars** hosted by the South Dakota Department of Education and the South Dakota State-Wide Title III & Migrant Consortia, ESL teachers, who can often feel isolated in their buildings and districts as the only ESL teacher for a K-12 district, began to feel a greater connection to

other ESL teachers in similar teaching contexts. Participants were generous with ideas, resources, and tips. Through the coming school year, these Zoom meeting check-ins will continue once a month.

Districts came to rely upon the collaborative, trusting **relationships that ESL teachers had established with EL families**. ESL teachers were vital in helping to communicate school announcements, policies, and resources to EL families on behalf of administrators and other teachers. Many districts plan to take steps to establish deeper relationships right away at the beginning of the 2020-21 school year through back-to-school technology nights, guidance on how to help students with homework, and gathering more information about unique family needs and concerns such as internet, devices, work schedules, and transportation.

In some cases, distance learning helped enhance **communication between ESL and content teachers**, prompting them toward more of a co-planning approach to support EL students as a team. Rather than seeing time with the ESL teacher as pull-out time, some teachers are discussing ideas like an 'open house' approach one day each week after school for content teachers to drop in and discuss the needs of their EL students. Another idea was taking 10 minutes of a monthly staff meeting to share out successful strategies for supporting English learners.

Resources

- [South Dakota Department of Education Starting Well webpage](#)
- [WIDA Family Connections through Home Languages / Conexiones familiares a través de lenguajes en el hogar](#)
- [Reflection Tool: ELs Returning to School in 2020](#)
- [Padlet of EL resources](#)
- [ELP listserv](#)