

Limited English Proficiency

Prior to referring a student for a special education evaluation, the team must determine whether the student has had a reasonable opportunity to learn or adjust to school. In order for a student to become proficient in a second language both basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) skills need to be developed.

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) are usually superficial oral language skills and take about two years to develop from the time of exposure to the second language. (e.g. "How are you?", "What did you do today?", "Let's go to the movies", etc.).

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) is the language the student needs to acquire for academic success and it usually take about five to seven years or longer to master.

In addition, students with Limited English Proficiency may be more comfortable speaking with other second language learners in a social setting, yet remain silent in the general education classroom. This silent period is a part of the learning process as the student attempts to make the needed connections between the first language and their newly acquired language.

Difference vs. Disability

It is critical to differentiate between a student who is not achieving in the classroom due to limited English proficiency, and a student who is not achieving due to a language disability. Whenever there is a question about a language difference vs. disability a speech-language pathologist should be included in the evaluation process.

Specific ELL considerations to be addressed prior to a referral for special education

A student can only be found to have a disability if the learning problems are present in **both** English and the individual's primary language. When eligibility for special education is being considered for these students, the team must rule out cultural differences and English proficiency as the **primary** reason for performance deficits.

It is important for school teams to obtain relevant information about a student's background, language development, school history and health. See "Parent Questionnaire (ELL)".

Concern

- Are problems evident in the student's first (primary) language?
 - Do native speakers of the student's language have difficulty understanding the student?
 - Does the student have difficulty following instructions in his/her native language as well as English?
- In addition to the general education teacher, do others have similar concerns? (e.g. parents, extended family members, ELL teacher, other support personnel)
- Is the student's progress in acquiring English significantly different from that of peers who started at or about the same level of English language proficiency and have had comparable instruction? See "Teacher Concern Questionnaire" and "Teacher Questionnaire (ELL)".

Interpreters

An interpreter is the link between the school culture and the culture of the student's family. The following practices should guide use of interpreters in the evaluation process.

- Interpreters should be used when school personnel are not fluent in the student's primary language.
- When assessing students, it is preferable to use a trained interpreter rather than a family member.
- Use interpreters when interviewing family or talking with the student in a language other than English.
- Ask interpreters to provide school personnel with knowledge about the student's culture, this is especially important when team members are unfamiliar with the culture of the student. See "Interpreter Questionnaire (ELL)"

Teachers

- Discuss with the ELL and/or general education teacher the student's acquisition of English in comparison to students who come from similar backgrounds and/or cultures. See "Teacher Questionnaire (ELL)".

Use of standardized measures

- Use standardized tests with caution. If the normative sample for the test did not include a comparable group or if the testing procedure was modified scores should NOT be reported.