

Chapter 4

Connecting with Parents of ELLs

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In this Chapter

- Identifying ELLs
 - Notifying parents and supporting parent choice
 - Recordkeeping: using parent information
 - For discussion
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As part of wider reforms that strive to drastically improve the academic performance of English Language Learners (ELLs), the Office of ELLs has invited parents to increase their involvement and awareness in the academic activities of their children. These efforts are supported by research showing the impact that strong parental involvement can have on the academic success of students, especially ELLs. Even in the compliance-oriented process of identifying and placing ELLs in appropriate services, parents are the main decision-makers in this process.

Identifying ELLs

As most New York City (NYC) residents know, our home is one of the largest, most diverse cities in America. The number of NYC public school students who speak a language other than English at home is estimated to be more than one third (43%) of the student population; however, not all of these students are entitled to ELL services. Some students with a non-English home language are proficient in English when they come into the school system. Others are students that have reached English proficiency in our ELL programs and transitioned into monolingual classes (also known as former ELLs). Current ELLs—a distinct yet dynamic student population—make up about 13.4% of the current student population, smaller than the initial number of students identified as possible ELLs. Also, this population changes from year to year as students enter and exit programs and the school system.

When parents first enroll their child in our schools, it is the responsibility of those at the school who are trained in student intake procedures to discuss home language with the family, and provide assessments to determine eligibility for English language support services. *The importance of attentive engagement with parents during the home language identification process cannot be stressed enough, as it is the process that initially determines whether a child may require ELL services.* If an ELL is not identified and placed in English-only classes, not



only are his or her chances of academic success severely limited, but such a misidentification is not in compliance with New York State regulations. The following screening and assessment instruments determine ELL eligibility (also see the Identification Chart in Appendix I):



Did you know...?
Enrollment Center staff might also inform parents of ELL identification and placement as well as program choice.

- **Home Language Identification Survey.** Typically at enrollment, trained school staff members meet with parents to make an initial determination of the child’s home language. This process is formalized through a Home Language Identification Survey (HLIS)—translated in nine languages—that parents complete to show what language the child speaks at home (Appendix B).
- **Language Assessment Battery-Revised.** Once school staff collect the HLIS from parents and determine that a language other than English is spoken in a child’s home, then the child is administered a Language Assessment Battery-Revised (LAB-R), which is a test that establishes English proficiency level. Those children that score at or below proficiency on the LAB-R become eligible for state-mandated services for ELLs.
- **New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT).** In the spring, each ELL is administered the NYSESLAT to determine English proficiency. This test determines whether or not the student continues to qualify for ELL services.

Students who speak Spanish at home and score at or below proficiency on the LAB-R are administered a Spanish LAB to determine language dominance. Schools are required by law to notify parents of their child’s eligibility for services (Appendix C, E, G and H) and provide information and service options (Appendix D). Also, schools must inform parents of their child’s placement (Appendix F). Arming parents with notifications and information, and maintaining a dialogue with them are at the heart of *informed parent choice*.

Special Education Identification

If a parent believes that his or her child is having learning difficulties in school, he or she is encouraged to speak with the child’s teachers and school administrators regarding support services that can be provided within regular education. If after these support services are provided the child continues to experience learning difficulties, the child may have a disability which affects his or her learning. Parents have the right to make a referral to the Committee on Special Education (CSE). The CSE will conduct a multidisciplinary evaluation to determine if the child has a disability. In the case of an ELL, the CSE must determine if the problems being experienced by the child in school are related to the natural process of second language acquisition, cultural/behavior norms or personal experiences. Evaluation assessments are to be conducted in the child’s native language and in English. If a child is determined to be eligible for special education services, a disability must be present in the child’s ability to learn in both the native language and English. For further information, view the Special Education in New York State for Children Ages 3-21: A Parent’s Guide at <http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/policy/parentguide.htm>. This guide is available in English and Spanish. Parents are also encouraged to view the NYC Department of Education’s Addendum to the Parent’s Guide at <http://www.nycenet.edu/NR/rdonlyres/69D78629-9B1B-4247-A23B-C09B581AFAB1/1201/AddendumtotheParentsGuide.pdf>.

Notifying parents and supporting parent choice



Did you know...?

The Translation & Interpretation Unit can help you translate important notifications for parents using your school's funds, including Titles I and III. Contact the Unit for more information (Appendix A).

Newly enrolled ELLs: Schools should make every effort to stay in close contact with ELL parents, from administering the HLIS, to informing them of their child's eligibility for ELL services, to collecting the forms that indicate the parent's program choice for their child. To encourage informed choice, schools should provide parents of newly enrolled ELLs with information on the different ELL programs that are available. Because the state requires that ELLs be placed in the appropriate program within ten days of enrollment, getting parents this information quickly and efficiently is critical to getting their input. Parents' choice, coupled with program availability, determines program placement for ELLs.

Chart 2. What do I send?			
Newly Enrolled ELLs			
Indicator		Home Language Identification Survey	
LAB-R	If child is . . .	Native English Speaker	Non-Native English Speaker
	Proficient	Not applicable	<i>Appendix E</i> Non Entitlement Letter
	Not Proficient	Not applicable	<i>Appendix C-D, F</i> Entitlement Letter and Parent Survey and Program Selection Form, Placement Letter
Currently Enrolled ELLs			
Indicator		ELL Program	
NYSESLAT		ESL	Bilingual
	Proficient	<i>Appendix H:</i> Non Entitlement/Transition Letter (students transition to all-English monolingual classes)	<i>Appendix H:</i> Non Entitlement/Transition Letter (students can remain in program at parent's request)
	Not Proficient	<i>Appendix G</i> Continued Entitlement Letter	<i>Appendix G</i> Continued Entitlement Letter

Because ELL parents often speak a language other than English, schools should use the translated materials (brochures, DVDs) provided by the Office of ELLs and services offered by the Translation and Interpretation Unit, including document translation and onsite interpretation services, as needed. Informational and question-and-answer sessions at most schools are provided through group orientations at the beginning of the year. However, schools must be prepared to inform parents throughout the year in a number of ways, including one-on-one meetings, phone conversations, regional presentations, or at the very least, through informational packets. Parent coordinators should work closely with ELL supervisors (ISSs, assistant principals, bilingual coordinators) and ELL instructional staff to coordinate school events for ELL parents and deliver information to them in a timely manner. For events among schools and within regions, parent coordinators should enlist the help of staff from other schools (bilingual/ESL teachers, other parent coordinators), regional staff (parent supervisors, ELL RISs and ISSs), and central staff (Office of ELLs, Parent Engagement Office). A short guide on how to organize an orientation is included in Appendix J.

Continuing ELLs: Each spring, ELLs are retested to evaluate their English proficiency using the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT). Schools must notify parents of NYSESLAT outcomes and program eligibility before the beginning of the next school year (Appendix G and H). ELLs that continue to score below a certain level of English proficiency continue to be entitled to ELL services.¹ ELLs scoring at or above that level are no longer entitled to ELL services through state funding and can enter all-English monolingual classes. Parents of ELLs in bilingual education programs can decide whether or not their child should continue, despite entitlement status. For instance, it is recommended that Dual Language students remain in the program for the length of their tenure, with or without ELL eligibility. Also, students who transition to all-English monolingual classes can receive bilingual or ESL support for up to a year, supported by state funds, according to CR Part 154.

Recordkeeping: Using parent information

Chart 3. Notification Resources				
Document	Appendix Hardcopy	CD Softcopy	Toolkit Hardcopy	Online (Fall, 2005) (www.nycenet.edu/Offices/ELL)
Home Language Identification Survey	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *
Sample Entitlement Letter	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *
Sample Parent Survey and Program Selection	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *

¹ All ELLs are entitled to up to six years of state-funded bilingual/ESL services; schools can request an extension each year for up to three years for ELLs who have received three or more years of service.

Form and Placement Letter			
Sample Non Entitlement Letter	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *
Sample Continued Entitlement Letter	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *
Sample Non Entitlement/Transition Letter	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *
Parent Brochure		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> *

*available in Arabic, Albanian, Bengali, Chinese, English, French, Haitian Creole, Korean, Polish, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish, & Urdu.

Using parent information, as well as properly maintaining and storing it, ensures that not only is parent choice being honored, but that parents are playing an active role in ELL program planning and design. The only way to maximize parent opportunity is to continuously monitor whether or not the school is meeting the parents’ needs as indicated on these forms. Also, parent choice information informs each school’s annual language allocation policy, as parent demand dictates what ELL programs schools should provide.

The Parent Survey and Program Selection Form (Appendix D), which is typically attached to the notification of entitlement to ELL services (Appendix C), provides specific information on how ELL program information is delivered. Parent coordinators should use the survey portion of this notification to make sure ELL parents are being reached, and that the information that they are getting is useful, thorough, and timely. (See the checklists on ELL intake, orientations, parent involvement and parent choice in Appendix K.) Parent coordinators, as well as other school personnel, must be able to access these forms and checklists throughout the year in a centralized location. Talk with those at your school who work closely with ELLs (e.g., language allocation plan committee, principal, assistant principals, bilingual/ESL teachers) to determine the best place to store and access paperwork on ELLs. Also, talk with regional ELL ISSs about specific strategies for storing and accessing ELL data, as they often request school-based data throughout the year.



Information about your school’s ELLs is collected using the Bilingual Education Student Information Survey (BESIS) which is entered into the Automate the Schools (ATS) system at your school. BESIS data is especially significant, as it determines state and federal ELL funding levels and compliance with performance standards for your school. Parent coordinators can ensure that information for the BESIS is entered into ATS accurately by:

- ✓ Reviewing school ATS reports on ELLs to ensure that information (e.g., home language, grade, and program) matches HLIS, LAB-R, and other information that you manage;
- ✓ Serving as a back-up to school staff in charge of entering ATS information for ELLs (often assigned to instructional or office staff, data entry for ELL information needs to be prioritized);
- ✓ Becoming familiar with BESIS codes in ATS (choose the BESIS ATS Course Documentation under “Document Catalog” at <http://www.nycboe.net/adminorg/Divisions/diit/doclib>);
- ✓ Contacting the NYC Department of Education’s Division of Instructional and Information Technology for questions or training schedules.

FOR DISCUSSION

CASE STUDY I

At PS ABC, a newly enrolled second grader's parents fill out a Home Language Identification Survey (HLIS) which indicates that Spanish and English are spoken at home. After the parent coordinator speaks to the child, in English, the parent coordinator suspects that the child is more comfortable speaking Spanish. The parent coordinator informs the parents that the child will be administered the LAB-R. The parents object, saying their child speaks fluent English for his age. What should the parent coordinator do?

CASE STUDY II

A parent chooses a Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) program for his middle school child at orientation, and at a later date decides he would rather have his child in a Freestanding English as a Second Language (ESL) program. He calls the parent coordinator in December to request that his child be moved into ESL after the holiday break. What should the parent coordinator tell him?

CASE STUDY III

In PS DEF, an elementary school, the ELL Instructional Support Specialist (ISS) and the parent coordinator conduct an orientation session for parents of Chinese-speaking ELLs. Parents watch the Chinese version of the Parent Orientation DVD, which gives an introduction to the New York City school system and the programs available for ELLs. After watching the DVD, many of the parents want to know the difference between the TBE and the Dual Language program. They want to know which one is better, and if they can switch from one program to the other at the end of one year. How can the parent coordinator help parents understand the programs so they can make an informed choice?

CASE STUDY IV

In PS GHI, an elementary school, the parent coordinator is conducting an orientation session for Haitian Creole-speaking parents of ELLs. Parents watch the Haitian Creole version of the Parent Orientation DVD, but after watching the DVD, the parents learn that this particular school offers ESL classes only. The parents want to know why the other programs introduced in the DVD are not available at the school. Some feel strongly that ESL is not the appropriate or ideal program for their children. What should the parent coordinator do to meet the needs of these parents?

CASE STUDY V

During a review of PS XYZ, 21 Korean-speaking eighth-grade ELLs were in an ESL program although there were sufficient numbers to create a bilingual class (based on Parent Survey and Program Information Forms, as well as defaults for non-returned forms). How can the parent coordinator help the school to ensure that parent choices are honored and appropriate services are provided?

CASE STUDY VI

After an ELL orientation, a parent at MS LMN selects a TBE program. This program model is not available at MS LMN. However, there is a TBE program at a nearby school. How can the parent coordinator assist the parent in getting his or her child transferred to that school?

CASE STUDY VII

After several months of a newly-arrived ELL's attendance at PS XYZ, the parent, who speaks Mandarin, notices that the child is having problems learning to read in English. The parent is very concerned and wants to know what she can do to help her child. What recommendations can the parent coordinator make to the parent?