

Supporting Long-Term English Learners

A Guide

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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide research and promising practices on how to support long-term English learners (LTELs). Tennessee defines a long-term English learner as a student who receives English as a second language (ESL) services for longer than six years. An EL becomes an LTEL when they enter into the seventh year of ESL services.

As the department has outlined in the resource [Supporting All English Learners Across Tennessee: A Framework for English Learners](#), it is imperative that we develop and implement a rigorous plan to support ELs to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to fulfill their chosen path in life. This guide is designed to support districts, schools, and educators in having conversations around their LTELs and developing and strengthening plans to support language and content acquisition. In order to ensure ELs are ready to graduate and be successful in postsecondary and workforce opportunities, the goal of Tennessee schools must be to move ELs through the program within 5-6 years, and even sooner for those entering at an early age. The U.S. Department of Education has a toolkit for ELs and another for newcomers online at [English Learner Toolkit](#) and [Newcomer Toolkit](#).

Guiding Principles

All of the guiding principles listed below support the department's [Tennessee Succeeds](#) vision that ALL students should be prepared for postsecondary and the workforce. Tennessee commits to ensuring that ELs are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and habits to be successful in their chosen path in life.

- We believe LTELs should be provided the appropriate differentiation, accommodation, and scaffolding to be able to access the correct grade-level Tennessee Academic Standards.
- We believe LTELs in middle school and high school should, wherever possible, be provided the opportunities to participate in electives based on academic interests.
- We believe LTELs should be part of the conversation around personal goal setting and individual academic data.
- We believe LTELs can exit ESL services and take advantage of early postsecondary opportunities in high school.
- We believe LTELs must have access to strong Tier I core instruction.

Landscape

Tennessee's EL population has seen dramatic growth over the past six years with 132 of the 147 districts in the state serving at least one EL in 2016-17. Out of the 52,000 ELs in 2016-17, 13 percent are LTELs.

In order for a student to be classified as a LTEL they must be in their seventh year of receiving ESL services; therefore, all LTELs must be in grades 6-12. Chart 1 below illustrates that 41 percent of ELs in grades 6-12 are LTELs. On average, LTELs have been receiving ESL services for eight years.

Chart 1

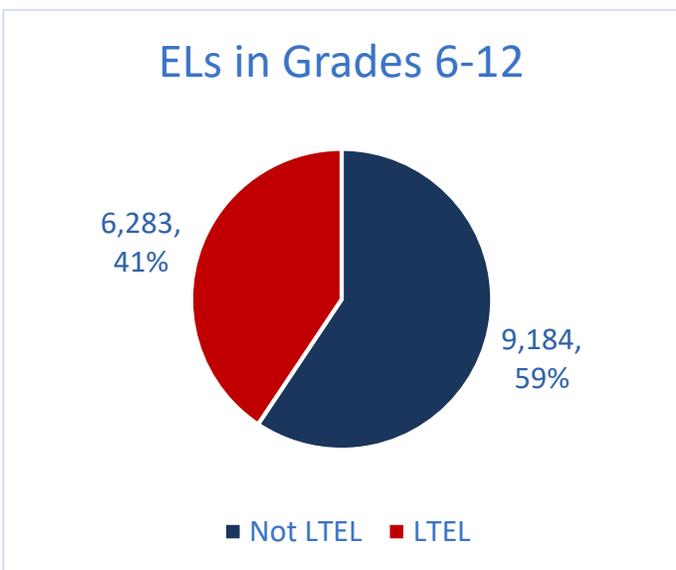


Chart 2

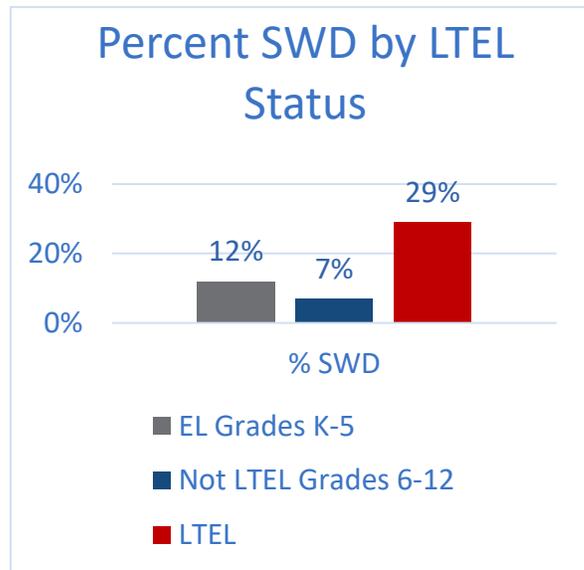


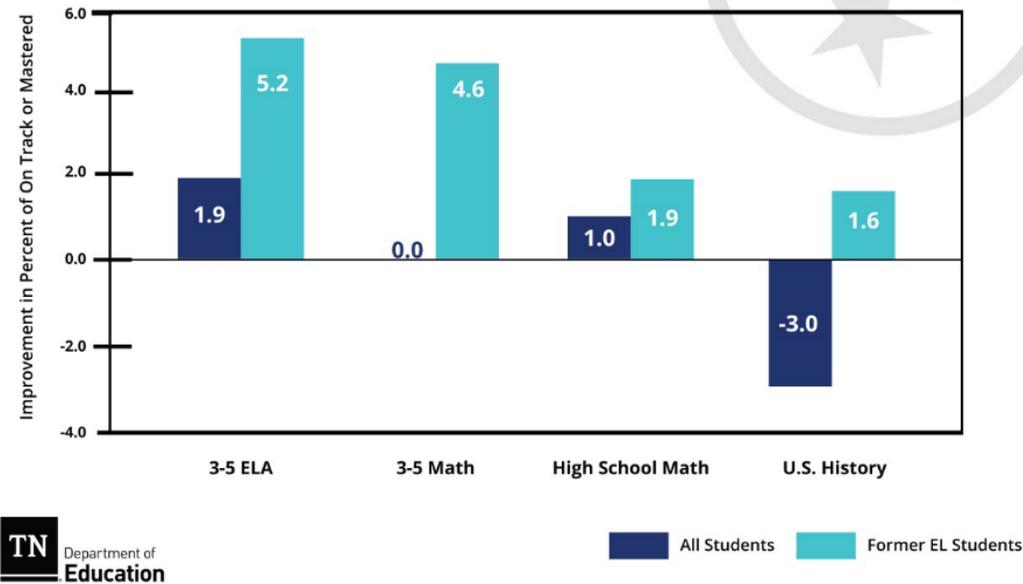
Chart 2 highlights the percent of ELs who are dually classified as a student with disabilities (SWD). Seven percent of non-LTEL ELs and 29 percent of LTELs are dually identified as a student with disabilities. This important data point highlights that some students who are LTELs may also have an additional support structure that is needed through an IEP, but the data clearly shows not all LTELs are students with disabilities.

Tennessee data also reveals that LTELs have lower chronic absenteeism rates than their non-LTEL peers and have rates similar to non-EL students. Fifteen percent of non-ELs are chronically absent, 17.6 percent of non-LTEL ELs are chronically absent, and 14.6 percent of LTELs are chronically absent. This shows that chronic absenteeism is not a major contributing factor to a student being a LTEL.

The 2017-18 TNReady scores for ELs show that the full English learner student group, which includes recently exited students, narrowed the gap with their non-EL peers in both math and English language arts (ELA), with an across-the-board increase in the percent of EL students scoring on track and mastered. Additionally ELs who have exited ESL services outgrew all students in percent of students on track or mastered on TNReady (Chart 3). For grades 3-5 ELA, 1.9 percent of all students improved in percent of on track or mastered whereas 5.2 percent of ELs improved. This trend continued across 3-5 math, high school math, and U.S. History. This exciting and impactful data shows that the tremendous work across the state should be celebrated and used as motivation to continue to push ourselves in this work.

Chart 3

Improvement of former English Learner students
Students who have exited EL services often outgrew all students



Characteristics of LTELs

Long-term English learners have unique language challenges that necessitate a differentiated approach to supporting language acquisition and content mastery.ⁱ

- LTELs often function socially in English and their home language but may lack the deeper levels of vocabulary, syntax, and grammar in order to successfully exit an ESL program.
- LTELs are often performing at the intermediate levels on the WIDA Access and may have been for multiple years.
- LTELs may have a significant deficit in one of the four areas of the WIDA Access (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), and it is often the productive skills of speaking and writing that present the largest barriers.
- LTELs may have developed coping mechanisms to “hide” their challenges with the English language, such as being reluctant to speak in whole group settings.
- LTELs may require additional supports outside of English language acquisition such as social and personal development or study skills.
- LTELs are at a greater risk of dropping out of school, as they may not see school as a place where they can be successful.
- LTELs are often ELs who were retained in a grade level.

Background Context on LTELs

Research

Exiting after the sixth year of ESL services falls within the range supported by seminal research on EL proficiency. However, educators should consider on an individual basis how this rate of growth can be improved through differentiated instruction. Current data reveals that students with lower English proficiency grow faster, and those with higher proficiency grow slower.ⁱⁱⁱⁱ These data, however, can be affected by more dynamic and tailored instruction. ESL teachers often document older students who exit and are proficient in two to four years. Many factors influence growth results:

- Student experience learning another or other languages
- Student literacy in his or her first language (L1)
- Student access to formal education
- Interruptions to the student’s formal education
- Evidence that classroom Tier I core instruction is differentiated
- EL ability to compare L1 and L2 and analyze the language similarities and differences

LTEL Influencing Factors

Although the factors for a student becoming a LTEL vary greatly, below are the most commonly documented reasons:^{iv}

- LTELS, in the course of their educational career, may not have received appropriate, rigorous English language instruction.
- LTELS may not have been held to high expectations.
- LTELS may have received inconsistent ESL program instruction.
- LTELS may have not had strong instruction in foundations of early literacy to authentic language.
- LTELS may not have experienced differentiation and scaffolding as needed.

High-quality, consistent, and differentiated instruction grounded in authentic language experiences can provide a necessary foundation to support English learners and prevent them from receiving ESL services for more than six years.

Phases of Language Acquisition

An important point for supporting language acquisition for ELs, and especially for LTELS, is ensuring that students are gaining the two types of language skills: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS refers to social language. BICS include information needed to have social conversations, navigate doctors' appointments, order in a restaurant, shop in various locations, etc. BICS usually develop in the first one to two years of studying a second language (L2). The grammar and syntax are simpler and easier to negotiate.

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) is language that centers on academics and literacy. CALP must be strong for an EL to succeed in academic subjects. Different subjects require subtle changes in language use with vocabulary, verb tenses, and syntax. Instructional leaders must ensure that all teachers working with ELs understand the differences and importance of reviewing, teaching, and assessing language skills for both BICS and CALP. In order to develop BICS and CALP, ELs need a supportive academic environment that is safe for language exploration.

Promising Practices

Given the right supports and opportunities, LTELS can exit ESL services and increase their academic achievement. Educators must take seriously the deficits in instruction and support ELs with dynamic instruction that is properly differentiated. The strategies listed below are examples to support growth

in LTELs. All educators working with ELs must, from the start of ESL, make sure that the following benchmarks are met by all ELs. ELs must be:

- moving from social language (BIC) to academic language (CALP),
- mastering the vocabulary and content in all academic subjects,
- understanding the different grammatical features used in different subjects, and
- writing in different academic subjects.

When we see that a student is lagging behind peers, changes to instruction are necessary. For more information on providing access to Tier I core instruction through differentiation, please see Component 2.1: Tier I Procedures in the [Tennessee Response to Instruction and Intervention \(RTI²\) Framework](#).

Course Placement^v

Appropriate course placement for ELs is a central element of successful language acquisition. In order to support this work, the department has updated ESL course codes to be based on a student's grade level. The content taught for a third grade EL should be different than a seventh grade EL, and the updated course codes reflect this distinction. ESL and core content teachers should be utilizing the [English language development standards](#) (ELDs) in conjunction with the appropriate grade-level academic standards.

All middle school ELs with a WIDA proficiency level of 1 to 3.4 should be enrolled in an ESL course and grade-level appropriate ELA course with supports so that they can access the content. High school students with a WIDA proficiency level 1 to 3.4 can take ELD 9 and/or ELD 10 and count the two courses toward two of the four English courses required for graduation if the EL is at a proficiency level where the content of the English class cannot be accessed with language supports. ELs must then take English I and/or English II after ELD 9 and 10. Schools, however, can choose to place high school students in an ESL course and ELA course for all four years of high school. Additional information on the new ESL course codes can be found [here](#).

Enrolling students in both an ESL and ELA course ensures that students are receiving instruction in the appropriate grade-level standard and are receiving the additional instruction necessary to support English language acquisition. This placement of students in ESL and ELA necessitates a strong system of communication between the ESL and general education teacher to ensure that students are receiving a reinforced and streamlined message and support from both teachers. The goal is never to lower the grade-level standards, but rather to move the EL to grade-level standards by providing needed support through peers and strong pedagogy.

In addition to appropriate course placement regarding ESL courses, it is important to consider what courses ELs are taking that are exposing them to, and preparing them for, postsecondary and career success. In Tennessee, 17 percent of ELs have access to early postsecondary opportunities (EPSOs), whereas 40 percent of non-EL students have access to EPSOs. **All students** should be given access to rigorous coursework that aligns with students' interests and postsecondary and career success, such as EPSOs and career and technical education.

Authentic Language

One of the strongest tools for ELs is using authentic language. Authentic language is communication used by a group for speakers of the same language and is not modified or adapted to be understood by outside groups. Some examples of uses of authentic language are:

- Discouraging dictionary use for students with interrupted formal education and allowing word usage to become authentic discussions between students and between the teacher and a student
- Encouraging more meaningful talk in the classroom by asking probing questions that require more analysis of a process rather than restatement of a fact
- Structuring conversations and writing projects to require discussion and collaboration prior to producing written work
- Using as much authentic text as possible while teaching students how to break text down and decode for meaning
- Including the EL in all classroom activities, with appropriate differentiation supports
- Providing frames or stems for working with sentence and paragraph writing skills

Academic Language

The focus on academic language is one element of a strong literacy program for ELs and LTELs. The [Teaching Literacy in Tennessee: English Learner Companion](#) is a great resource on implementing rigorous academic language into general education and ESL courses.

Other ways to focus on academic language are to implement the elements of different program models, such as specially designed academic instruction (SDAIE) or a school-wide model of sheltered instruction observation protocol (SIOP). Both of those ESL program models stress the importance of focusing on academic language in context. Other models which may not be school-wide models such as structured immersion, sheltered content, content-based instruction, and even push-in should be built around academic standards to promote academic language at the for all levels of proficiency. Additional information on the ESL program models can be found in the [ESL Manual](#).

Cultural Competencies^{vi}

LTEs may view themselves as not fitting into education due to years of ESL courses and lower academic achievement. Students should have a role in informing their educational goals and plans through discussion related to their Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) and their analysis of their needs for success in the classroom. Messaging and communicating strengths to LTEs, such as bilingualism, and their role in the school community is central, but in addition to that, students need to develop engagement through explicit teacher planning and authentic opportunities.

Engagement opportunities can include reading a passage from a text that is about the student's cultural background and reading about American culture to compare and contrast or allowing students to complete projects in their own area of interest.

Teachers who have, or are developing, culturally responsive classrooms are open to celebrate the similarities and differences that exist among their students. The culturally responsive teacher is charged with creating a safe and friendly environment so ideas and traditions are explored openly. Acceptance of differences should be embraced. Through this, children develop understanding of the richness of blending cultures, religions, and ideas from across the world. This investigation of various cultures is highly engaging for all students.

Individual Learning Plans (ILPs)

In 2017 the state board passed [policy 3.207](#) for school year 2017-18, which requires all ELs to have an individual learning plan (ILP). The ILP is an excellent tool to support LTEs with its focus on goal setting and differentiated instruction. A FAQ on ILPs can be found [here](#) and a sample ILP [here](#). ILPs are developed in collaboration with the ESL and general education teacher, student, and parents or guardians. The plans provide an opportunity to discuss a student's current progress and make adjustments for necessary changes. Conversations should be framed as opportunities for growth.

When creating an ILP for an LTE, consider the following questions:

- 1) Which section of the WIDA ACCESS (listening, speaking, reading, or writing) is the student's strength; which is a student's area for growth? How can this information be leveraged to develop the ILP?
- 2) Which language supports have been used with fidelity in the past and should be continued? Which have not been used to provide access to instruction? Which have proven ineffective?
- 3) Do both the general education and ESL teacher have the necessary understanding of the language supports to implement with fidelity?

- 4) What are students' secondary and postsecondary goals? How can the ILP be used as a way to begin communicating growth to meet these goals?
- 5) What subjects, topics and skills are of high interest to the EL?
- 6) For subjects, topics, and skills that are of low interest to the EL, how can their presentation be altered?
- 7) How can the LTEL's feedback be incorporated into the ILP?

Social and Personal Competencies

In the [K-12 Social and Personal Competencies Resource Guide](#), it defines social and personal competencies (SPC) as a set of skills that empower children and adults to be successful in life. The skills include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. These skills are important to develop in all students, not just LTELS, but should be kept as a cornerstone of LTEL support.

Development of social and personal competencies is an important foundational element to academic growth. Development of social and personal competencies should not be viewed as something "outside" of academic instruction but should be folded into daily instruction.

Student Profiles: Promising Practices in Action

Let's take a look at the profiles of four examples of LTELs in Tennessee. Each of LTEL has their own unique background and language development journey. The promising practices listed below are effective with all ELs. In supporting an LTEL, it is important to consider what has been done in the past and how instruction should be shifted to address each student's needs.



Student 1	Student 2	Student 3	Student 4
Entering 7th Grade	Entering 7th Grade	Entering 11th Grade	Entering 8th Grade
Born in Mexico	Born in France	Born in Somalia	Born in the United States
Came to the U.S. in the second grade after one year of formal schooling	Came to the U.S. in kindergarten	Came to U.S. in fourth grade with no formal schooling	Entered school in pre-K and identified as EL in kindergarten
	Identified as a student with disabilities	Suffered from post-traumatic stress for about two years	

Student 1: Student 1 is a seventh grader in their fifth year of ESL, within range of exit. The team of teachers working with this student should work diligently to update the Individual Learning Plan (ILP) and keep academic and English language acquisition moving forward. The student is proficient with social language but is still working on academic language: vocabulary and grammar. The student should be close to exit from active ESL classes and ready to access curriculum in the general education classroom with monitoring. Input from the student and teachers will support the student's needs and push her forward.

Metacognition of her personal needs, when those needs are determined, should be handled with an ESL lens of the skills through grade-level materials and standards. For example, a non-ESL professional may listen to an EL speaking and only hear a verb error in "The teacher *writted* that on the board." However, the ESL teacher will realize that the student is at a place in language development where students make all past tense verbs regular. This is the normal progression and demonstrates that the

EL has knowledge of past tense. Both the ESL teachers and general education teachers must keep in mind the linguistic skill set the EL possesses. Effective teachers will help even beginners understand their needs by developing meta-cognitive skills at the linguistic level she can handle to enhance her understanding of her needs for learning English. Her work this year will be closely differentiated to her interests and needs. This would be a proper time to provide push-in ESL support and teach ESL through content materials and activities.

Student 2: The second student is moving into his eighth year of ESL instruction. He is making slow but steady progress academically with intervention in his deficit areas due to his disability. His English language acquisition growth has slowed over the past two years. The Individual Education Plan (IEP) team is discussing if the plateau indicates that ESL is not the service needed. Perhaps he would make better gains from more time in special education services and in the general education classroom. The IEP team, with an ESL teacher as a member, will determine what is best for this student and an ILP should coordinate with student needs. Differentiation will move this student forward to reach goals. Exit may not be a reality for this student, but neither is denying him the possibility. The focus is on providing the most meaningful service possible.

Student 3: Our third student is moving in the 11th grade after seven years of ESL instruction. She suffered from post-traumatic stress and was unable to access formal education in her home country. Upon arrival in the U.S., she was behind academically and had no experience with English. After arriving in the U.S., she had difficulty being involved in group work. She was seen by a counselor during the school day for more than a year. Her family moves frequently due to financial difficulties. Each move to a new school is difficult and requires a period of readjustment. She is happiest now when she is with grade-level peers involved in academics.

This student needs her academic weaknesses and language gaps supported. Her ILP needs to challenge her abilities and motivate her. Teachers must review the ILP carefully and evaluate what has worked for the student and what has not helped. This review of previous supports should guide teachers in determination of the most meaningful support. Push-in instruction is when the ESL teacher goes into the general education classroom for small group instruction or go-teaching. Push-in services are a good consideration for her. Since she still struggles with the lack of academic vocabulary and with writing styles needed for her courses, providing her with visuals of tangible vocabulary and working with a peer for intangible vocabulary might be beneficial. Taking time to allow her to read good examples of proper writing in the subject area writing of her high-flying peers and allowing them to team with her on revisions will provide authentic language experiences for additional language supports. She needs to be involved in making decisions about her learning.

Student 4: Student 4 is an eighth grader, born in the United States to a family that does not speak English at home. He entered school in pre-K and was identified as an English learner in kindergarten. He did not master social language until third grade. The gap grew with his academics since his prior instruction did not support teaching academic language before, or with, social language. He began sixth grade with very limited academic language or knowledge. For this student, the focus needs to be on academic language and skills. He is at an age where he can contribute to his ILP. Goals should be short-term and attainable. With intentional instruction that is requiring both a linguistic and an academic stretch, he should be able to exit this year.

Next Steps - Checklist

Below is a suggested checklist to support schools in developing next steps prior to the start of the school year in supporting LTELs.^{vii}

- Develop a clear vision and high expectations for ELs and LTELs, including academic goals.
- Analyze English learner data to identify the current LTELs.
- Ensure that the classroom is a safe environment for practicing English skills.
- Select the appropriate program model. Additional information on EL program models can be found in the [English as a Second Language Manual](#).
- Set a goal, based on individual students' data, on benchmark growth to be able to exit ESL services and add the information to each student's individual learning plan (ILP).
- Ensure all ESL and general education teachers are aware of the ELs and LTELs in their classes.
- Ensure all general education teachers who teach EL students are appropriately trained on the WIDA English Language Development (ELD) Standards.
- Ensure Tier I core instruction is appropriate for the level of English proficiency through the use of differentiation and scaffolding.
- Develop ILPs for each LTEL in collaboration with the student, teachers, and family members.
- Benchmark LTEL progress over the course of the year and change strategies as appropriate.

Conclusion

Schools and districts must focus on providing quality ESL services and instructional supports early in an EL's career. For all ELs, differentiation and careful support of language is central to strong instruction, but these methods and analysis of what is working and what should be changed is integral when a student becomes an LTEL. There is not a single set of reasons for why a student becomes an LTEL; therefore, there is not a single LTEL specific strategy to support English acquisition. High-quality

instruction is high-quality instruction, but how the instruction is conveyed or which strategies are employed depends on each student's specific needs, ELs or LTELs.

Even beginning ELs must be exposed to authentic texts and ELD and Tennessee Academic grade-level standards. Students are more motivated and interested when learning with grade-level peers as they work on grade-level academics. English is the essential tool that ELs need to access grade-level academics. Tennessee's goal is to teach more effectively and plan more intentionally so that all ELs will continue to grow academically.

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