

TENNESSEE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION	
ESL PROGRAM POLICY	3.207

The English as a Second Language (ESL) Program Policy is designed to set minimum standards for Tennessee school districts in providing services to non-English language background (NELB) students who are also English Learners (ELs). These students are often referred to as English Language Learners (ELLs).

States, districts, and schools are required to provide specialized programs for limited English proficient (LEP) students to comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1965 and T.C.A. § 4-21-90. This ESL policy has two purposes. First, it establishes the minimum required compliance components for ESL programs in Tennessee. Second, it provides a framework for implementing effective educational programs for ELLs. The policy includes these components: anti-discriminatory policies and practices, identification of ELLs, parental notification and rights, service delivery models, and staffing ratios. The appendix includes the definitions of many of the terms used in this policy.

Anti-Discrimination Policies and Practices

To comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1965, T.C.A. § 4-21-90, and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974, all school districts must have anti-discriminatory policies that preclude denial of equal education opportunities to individuals based on race, color, or national origin. To comply with anti-discriminatory policies, district practices must not result in the inappropriate placement of ELLs in or the exclusion from special opportunity programs or activities based on English language proficiency or national origin. The Supreme Court decision, *Plyler v. Doe*¹, prohibits school districts from denying undocumented immigrant children a free public education and rejects the denial or exclusion of educational services for immigrant children due to financial burden.

Identification of English Language Learners

To comply with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the newest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), each state must have a uniform process for the identification of NELB students who are ELLs. In Tennessee, this is a two-step process.

STEP 1: School districts administer the Home Language Survey to all students in the district. The Home Language Survey consists of three questions that will be asked of every parent enrolling his/her child in the school district. These questions are:

1. What is the first language this child learned to speak?
2. What language does this child speak most often outside of school?
3. What language do people usually speak in this child's home?

If the answer to *any* of the above questions is a language other than English, the child will be classified as NELB and assessed for English proficiency using an approved screening assessment for ESL.

¹ *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202 (1982).

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STEP 2: Unless an NELB student has documentation from a previous state or district that he or she has met the definition of Fluent English Proficient (FEP), school districts must assess all NELB students with the state approved English language proficiency screener to determine whether the student is LEP. All NELB students who are determined to have limited English proficiency must be identified as ELLs and ESL services must be provided through an allowable service delivery model.

In content area classes, teachers must modify instruction and assessment to make content area standards and curriculum accessible to ESL students. Students may not be retained due to language ability.²

Parental Notification and Rights

School districts shall communicate information related to testing, placement, and ESL services to all parents on NELB students in the language and method that the parent can understand, to the extent practicable. Parents of ELLs must be informed of the right to refuse placement of their children in ESL programs. If the parent refuses direct ESL services for the student, the regular classroom teacher will be responsible for ESL services to this child. Parents must also be advised of studies related to an emergent ELL.

Service Delivery Models

Tennessee State Board of Education Rule 0520-01-03-.05 defines ESL, which is an alternative language program for ELLs, as “English instruction especially designed for speakers of other languages.” An ESL program may be provided through various service delivery models including:

- ESL pull-out programs,
- ESL cluster centers to which students are transported from their zone schools,
- Resource centers/ESL laboratories,
- Newcomer centers
- Push-in or inclusion models,
- Sheltered content classes,
- Content based ESL classes,
- Structured immersion classes, or
- Scheduled ESL class periods.

The Tennessee Department of Education must approve other models based on the available evidence of their effectiveness. All models must address how academic deficits that are the result of students' limited English proficiency will be remediated. The ESEA demands that all ESL service be founded on research-based educational practices.

At the elementary level, a certificated or endorsed ESL teacher must provide direct services one to two hours per day for pre-functional, beginning, and intermediate ELLs (WIDA level 1.0 to 3.5 on composite and literacy). Students at the advanced level (WIDA level 3.6 to 5.0 on composite

² Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1965. *Lau v. Nichols*, 414 U.S. 563 (1974).

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and literacy) may have programs more tailored to their needs including, but not limited to, fewer hours of ESL direct instruction, skills based interventions, and other recommendations that are differentiated for the particular ELL. ELLs should continue to receive up to one hour of direct service each day until they achieve English proficiency that allows transition to regular academic programs to take place for content areas of instruction.

Transitional ELL students are considered proficient and may be mainstreamed in the regular classroom with careful monitoring for two years. Should a transitional student begin to have difficulty in classes, he or she should receive meaningful ESL support immediately. If this support is not successful, the district must have a procedure in place to reclassify the student as an ELL.

At the high school level, districts shall use one course code for all ESL course work. Two ESL credits may be counted toward the four English credits required for graduation. Additional ESL courses shall be counted as elective credits. It is recommended that ELLs achieve the intermediate level on the English language proficiency test before taking a regular English course. An ELL may need up to five years and a summer to receive a regular diploma. However, an ELL who requires the extended time will not be considered an on time graduate. Due to course requirements for graduation, there can be more flexibility in service hours to alleviate issues related to scheduling classes. A pre-functional and beginning ELL student (WIDA level 1.0 to 3.5 on composite and literacy) should never have less than one hour of ESL service per day.

Staffing Ratios

Appropriate staffing of ESL programs is based on two criteria. First, districts will provide adequate ESL faculty to implement the chosen service delivery model effectively, as documented by the progress in English language proficiency and academic content of their ELLs. Second, districts will adequately staff their ESL programs to meet federal compliance requirements, including but not limited to, communication to parents, identification of English language learners, and monitoring of transitional ELLs.

To meet the two criteria of effective and compliant ESL programs, districts shall implement ESL programs based on the following staffing ratio standards:

- ESL class sizes shall not exceed state mandated grade level class size requirements; and
- The district-wide ESL program staffing ratio shall be based on an average of no more than 40 identified ELL students per full-time ESL endorsed teacher unless an alternate staffing ratio is approved by the Tennessee Department of Education. An alternative staffing ratio can only be approved when the district is showing adequate academic growth with the ELL population.

Districts seeking approval for an alternate district-wide staffing ratio shall provide the following information annually to the Tennessee Department of Education:

- The number of ELLs served;
- The proficiency levels of those ELLs;
- The most recent analysis for the ELL subgroup for achievement assessments in Reading/Language Arts, mathematics, and science;

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- The proposed staffing ratio that will be used in place of the recommended 40 to 1 ratio; and
- The justification for the alternate staffing ratio.

Exit Criteria

English Learners may be exited, also referred to as reclassification, as transition ELLs when the scores for both composite and literacy on the WIDA ACCESS are 5.0 or higher. Students in the first and second years of transition are referred to as T1 and T2 respectively. During this transition period, students must be monitored and served as needed. With the implementation of the ESSA, ELLs will remain in transition for two additional years, respectively T3 and T4. During those years, no service beyond what would be done to differentiate for any student is expected of the district, however, these students may be added to the EL subgroup for accountability.

Attachments:

Definition of Terms

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Definitions for English as a Second Language Programs:

Beginning/intermediate English Learners (EL) - NELB students who have been administered the English language proficiency assessment and score pre-functional, beginning, or intermediate on the English language proficiency assessment and are thereby entitled to ESL services.

English Language Learners (ELL) [formerly Limited English Proficient (LEP)] - non-English language background students whose level of oral, reading, and written proficiency in English does not allow them to fully benefit from the curriculum and creates difficulty in regular classroom curriculum without specially designed modifications. ELL students have not yet met the definition of fluent English proficient (FEP), which in Tennessee is determined by 5.0 composite and literacy scores on the WIDA ACCESS assessment.

English as a Second Language (ESL) - English as a Second Language courses that meet Tennessee State Board of Education Rule 0520-01-03-.05 definition of "English instruction especially designed for speakers of other languages." In Tennessee, a teacher providing ESL instruction must have an ESL endorsement.

Fluent English Proficient (FEP) - NELB students who meet one of the following criteria:

1. Upon initial enrollment in a Tennessee public school, scored proficient or advanced on the state approved English language proficiency test; or
2. Initially qualified as ELL based on the state approved English language proficiency assessment, received ESL services, and have now scored a composite and literacy score of at least 5.0 on the WIDA ACCESS assessment.

Home Language Survey - the questions asked of all students within the school district to determine whether students are non-English language background. The questions are:

1. What is the first language this child learned to speak?
2. What language does this child speak most often outside of school?
3. What language do people usually speak in this child's home?

Limited English Proficient (LEP) - this is the federal term formerly used for ELL.

Non-English Language Background (NELB) - a student whose answer to any of the questions on the home language survey is a language other than English.

Transitional ELs (T1, T2) - NELB students, who were classified as ELL and have scored 5.0 or better on the composite and literacy portions of the WIDA ACCESS.