

## Supporting English Learners with Disabilities with the New Individualized Education Program (IEP): Quick Reference Guide

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) made improvements to the IEP form for use beginning in School Year 2024-2025 including improvements intended to ensure that Teams address the disability and English language acquisition needs of dually eligible students. This quick reference guide will discuss how each of the five focus areas for the revised IEP, and accompanying strategies and resources, can improve supports and outcomes for English learners with disabilities. For more information and planning considerations related to completing the English learner section of the new IEP, see pages 4-5 of the MA [IEP Technical Guide](#).

### Areas of Focus for the Revised IEP

1. Family and Student Voice
2. Improved Outcomes and Access
3. Least Restrictive Environment
4. Coordinated Transition Planning
5. Accessibility of Language

### Focus Area 1: Family and Student Voice

Critical to DESE's [Educational Vision](#) is an environment where educators develop a true understanding of the students and adults in their school communities, so *all* students feel valued at school for their cultural and linguistic diversity. The new form enhances the IEP development process with family and student voice.

#### Strategies for Educators:

- Encourage all IEP Team members to get to know English learners with disabilities and their families, including their visions for post-school outcomes.
- Maintain high expectations for the academic success of English learners with disabilities.
- Use diverse texts representative of the culture, background, and interests of English learners with disabilities.
- Learn more about what makes each student's culture, language, and interests unique.
- Learn how each student's culture and language are similar to or different from that of students who speak other languages or have different cultures.

#### Resource Spotlight:

- The [Massachusetts Blueprint for English Learner Success](#) includes a [Quick Reference Guide](#) on Classroom Level Effective Family Engagement.
- DESE's *Better Together: Family School Partnership Fundamentals* online training module explains how family-school partnership is everyone's job. You can review this resource as [part of the RLO](#) or separately in a [handout](#) form.
- DESE has information and resources on [culturally and linguistically sustaining](#) practices.
- The U.S. Department of Education offers research-based strategies in [Strategies for Equitable Family Engagement](#).
- The WIDA Consortium offers [resources to strengthen connections with families](#).

- The U.S. Departments of Justice and Education have published [Information for Limited English Proficient \(LEP\) Parents and Guardians and for Schools and School Districts that Communicate with Them](#).

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## Focus Area 2: Improved Outcomes and Access

To support meaningful access to and progress in the general curriculum, IEPs for English learners with disabilities should include input from educators and specialists knowledgeable about the student’s language acquisition and English Learner Education (ELE) programming. EL teachers and information from WIDA ACCESS testing are important resources for understanding the learning needs of English learners with disabilities and how to better meet their individualized needs. The new IEP provides educators across disciplines the opportunity to collaborate and coordinate to improve how instruction is designed and delivered for English learners with disabilities.

### **Strategies for Educators:**

- Use grade-level data meetings and other types of professional learning communities as opportunities to analyze whether – and which type of – instruction is meeting the needs of English learners with disabilities.
- Identify and document English language classroom scaffolds that have proven effective for English learners with disabilities.
- Identify and document appropriate accommodations for state- and district-wide assessments (including WIDA ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS).
- Review and determine the significance of students’ WIDA ACCESS English language proficiency scores for instructional design.
- The LOOK Act<sup>1</sup> applies to English learners with disabilities and requires school districts to:
  - Adopt procedures to identify English learners who do not meet English proficiency benchmarks; and
  - Establish a process for the district to:
    - Identify the areas in which identified English learners need improvement and establish personalized goals for attaining English proficiency;
    - Assess and track the progress of English learners who did not meet benchmarks in the identified areas in need of improvement;
    - Review resources and services available to assist English learners in the identified areas in need of improvement; and
    - Incorporate input from the parents or legal guardian of the identified English learner.
- Determine which strategies support students’ access to content based on disability *as well as* language acquisition.

### **Resource Spotlight:**

- DESE has developed [Guidance for Supporting English Learners with Disabilities](#) and [Guidance for the Use of Benchmarks Toward Attaining English Proficiency](#).
- [Chapter 6 of the English Learner Tool Kit](#) from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) provides an overview of Tools and Resources for Addressing English Learners with Disabilities.

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<sup>1</sup> An Act Relative to Language Opportunity for Our Kids, 2017 Mass. Acts Chapter 138.

- The U.S. Departments of Justice and Education delivered guidance via a [Dear Colleague letter](#), which addresses how schools can fulfill obligations to English learners and Limited English Proficient parents.
- Resources available through the WIDA website can help educators understand WIDA Access Scores and use them to design effective instructional supports. Interpretation guides are available for the [ACCESS Test \(Grades K-12\)](#), as well as the [Alternate ACCESS Test](#) designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Please also see WIDA's [bulletin](#) on access to complex language for English learners with disabilities.

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### Focus Area 3: Least Restrictive Environment

With the new IEP, educators can remove barriers and build supports to help English learners with disabilities progress in the general curriculum. Like all students with disabilities, English learners with disabilities must be educated in the least restrictive environment in accordance with their IEPs.<sup>2</sup> When English learners with disabilities are in their classrooms, all educators are responsible for delivering instruction that supports them.

#### *Strategies for Educators:*

- Examine accessibility of all district programming and meaningfully integrate specially designed instruction within educational settings to best meet the unique needs of English learners with disabilities.
- Use research-based language acquisition strategies in instruction, including with English learners with disabilities.
- Conduct ongoing assessment to confirm that supports and scaffolds continue to be effective for English learners with disabilities.
- Alter and adapt scaffolds, as needed.

#### *Resource Spotlight:*

- [Chapter 5 of English Learner Toolkit](#) offers guidance for creating an inclusive environment and for avoiding the unnecessary segregation of English Learners. Three tools are available, including (Tool #3) a self-monitoring rubric for LEAs.
- The most recent guidance from the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs related to English learners with disabilities is included in this policy letter: [Policy Letter \(November 15, 2021\)](#).

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### Focus Area 4: Coordinated Transition Planning

The intentional engagement of English learners with disabilities and their families in the development of a vision and plan to prepare for life after high school is key to preparing students for successful postsecondary education, employment, independent living, and civic life in a global community. Coordinated transition planning for English learners with disabilities and their families should take into account the student and family's cultural beliefs, values, and concerns related to transition expectations.

#### *Strategies for Educators:*

- Take time to learn more about the dreams, cultural beliefs, values, and concerns related to the transition expectations of English learners with disabilities and their families.

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<sup>2</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.114; 603 CMR 28.06(2)(b)-(c).

- Focus on using assets-based views and language in discussions, as students and families' dreams, cultural beliefs, values, and concerns related to transition expectations may differ from dominant American cultural beliefs and values.
- Provide resources related to transition services and postsecondary life that can be easily digested based on language proficiency and reading levels, when appropriate.

**Resource Spotlight:**

- DESE's webpage houses resources specifically for [Secondary Transition Planning](#).
- DESE has also released a Secondary Transition Planning with the New Individualized Education Program (IEP) Form Quick Reference Guide.

## Focus Area 5: Accessibility of Language

To ensure that families of English learners with disabilities understand and can fully participate in the IEP meetings, educators must take whatever actions are necessary, including arranging for appropriate and competent interpreters for parents whose native language is other than English.<sup>3</sup> All Communications with parents about IEP meetings must be in both English and the primary language of the home.<sup>4</sup> Appropriate and competent interpreters or translators have proficiency in target languages, ease of written and oral expression, knowledge of specialized terms or concepts, expertise in the content being interpreted, and also training on their role, the ethics of interpreting and translating, and the need for confidentiality. Although interpreters and translated documents are required and useful, they are not enough to ensure that students and families understand the IEP process.

**Strategies for Educators and Administrators:**

- Take time to explain the IEP process to each family, using an interpreter to promote accessibility and understanding. To promote families' understanding and full participation in the IEP meeting, it may be helpful to hold a pre-meeting with the family and interpreter to review the IEP process and any data to be discussed during the meeting.
- Examine the extent to which the professional interpreter uses best practice guidelines and communicates information in parent-friendly language.
- Work with the interpreter and family members to determine whether they will be interpreting simultaneously, or consecutively.
- Familiarize yourself with best practices for communicating with families when interpreters are present
- Direct families to the Federation for Children with Special Needs' [Parent Training and Information Center](#) for additional support.

**Resource Spotlight:**

- [Chapter 10 of the EL Toolkit](#) from the U.S. Department of Education's OELA provides a guide and resources for collaborating with parents with limited English proficiency.
- The National Association of Educational Translators and Interpreters of Spoken Languages (NAETISL) summarizes Best Practices for Special Education Interpreters in [this infographic](#). See page 2 for specific considerations for school leaders and educators.

<sup>3</sup> 34 C.F.R. § 300.322(e); *Dear Colleague* letter at page 27 available at: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> 603 CMR 28.07(8).