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Guidelines for Serving English Learners (ELs) in Prekindergarten (PreK)

This document is to provide guidelines for serving Prekindergarten students who are Multilingual English Learners (ML-ELs).

Each and every young child and family in Vermont has diverse strengths rooted in their unique culture, heritage, language, beliefs and circumstances. They have gifts and abilities that should be celebrated and nurtured. Full participation means promoting a sense of belonging, supporting positive social relationships, and enabling families and early childhood professionals to gain the competence and confidence to positively impact the lives of each and every child and their family. (Vermont Early Childhood Guiding Principles).

Welcoming English Learners (ELs) into prekindergarten is an opportunity to promote the value and acceptance of cultural diversity for all children in Vermont classrooms. It is also a chance for early childhood educators to reflect on their own teaching practices and learning environments to ensure that every child's home language and culture are reflected in both. Below are guidelines for EL Specialists serving EL children in prekindergarten settings.

EL Support and Universal Prekindergarten Education

In federal statute, 20 U.S. Code § 7801, the defining age range for English Learners (ELs) is 3 – 21. In 2022, Vermont passed Act 128, which follows the federal guidance for defining ELs as starting at age 3. This would include all prekindergarten children in publicly funded programs.

As the definition of ELs expressed through the defining age range (3-21) exists in both federal and state law, it is implied and considered best practice to provide EL services to students who are identified as EL in both public and private Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) prequalified education programs.

Identification and Screening

To ensure equitable access to Universal Prekindergarten (UPK) for all children, it is recommended that school districts provide supports for EL families to enroll their EL PreK students. Input from the school district's EL Specialist is vital in creating effective enrollment procedures and supports for EL families. Supports may include forms translated into the family's home language,



paper forms if the family has limited access to the internet, and support with completing the forms via a community resource such as: translators, social workers, EL specialists, or multilingual liaisons.

It is best practice to identify Multilingual ELs as soon as they enter the district. This is done via the [Home Language Survey](#).

There are two cases in which students should be referred to EL specialists for further screening:

1. There is a language other than English indicated on the Home Language Survey of the student and/or
2. The student was born outside the US or Puerto Rico.

If the EL specialist determines that an English language screening is warranted, there are multiple screening tools available:

- **Pre-IPT** is an oral preschool language proficiency screener that examines vocabulary, grammar, comprehension, and verbal expression. An examiner guides the student through a story with a story board and pieces, prompting the child to label objects and discuss story topics or the child's own experiences.
- **preLAS** is an oral language proficiency assessment, broadly assessing receptive and expressive vocabulary, comprehension skills, grammar, and verbal expression. Students play a series of games that prompt them to follow instructions, label items, repeat words, and tell stories.
- **preLAS Observational Assessment** that provides an observational approach to the preLAS.
- **Oklahoma Pre-Kindergarten Screening Tool (PKST)** is a conversational tool in which an examiner asks the student several questions about themselves, rating their ability to appropriately communicate in English and with grammatical correctness.
- **Woodcock Muñoz Language Survey (WMLS)** provides a battery of oral language assessments that examines children's listening and speaking skills.

This screening should be completed in concert with an Early Learning endorsed teacher present.

It is required that parents are notified of their student's status as an English learner within 30 days of enrollment and that the type of services the student may be receiving be disclosed. Parents/Guardians should be given the opportunity to decline these services.

Although no annual ELP assessment (WIDA ACCESS) is required or recommended for these learners, when the student moves into kindergarten, it is best practice to rescreen

the student with the speaking and listening domains of the WIDA Screener for Kindergarten to determine if EL status is maintained.

PreK Students and Data Collections

If the student is determined to be an EL through the screening scores and in consultation with the Early Learning teacher, or if the student qualifies as an immigrant, the student's information needs to be loaded into the [AOE's EL data collection site](#). Please note that identified PreK EL students should be counted in school/district wide counts of ELs in data collections and thus it's important for districts to maintain records of which PreK students qualify for EL services.

In addition, PreK EL student counts need to be reported to assist with the determination of ADM in the State's pupil weighting formula.

PreK EL Services & Family Engagement

To support EL Specialists, it is recommended that school districts outline procedures for providing services to PreK students in public and private UPK prequalified programs as part of their districtwide Lau Plans. Best practice for any services received should be intentional for assisting PreK students with meaningful access to developmentally appropriate curriculum aligned with the [Vermont Early Learning Standards \(VELS\)](#). EL PreK service procedures should include collaboration between the EL Specialist, the early childhood educator, and the student's family. Family engagement and involvement is a priority in prekindergarten education. Through this triangular collaboration, EL Specialists may provide guidance, supports, and resources. The EL Specialists may provide direct services to the PreK student or work in collaboration with the early childhood educators who may provide the services, or a combination of both service delivery models. EL Specialists are not required, nor should they be expected to, deliver EL services via home visits.

High quality PreK programs focus on family engagement which is especially important for families of EL students. Families of EL students should have input in decision-making for their PreK child and provided notifications in the family's home language. Through family engagement, relationships are built upon mutual respect for the family's culture and language, which the family should be encouraged to share with the school.

Please see the Useful Resources section for tools that may be utilized when providing developmentally appropriate services for PreK EL students in collaboration with early childhood educators and their families.

Early Multitiered System of Support (Early MTSS) and ELs

Implementation of Early MTSS practices affirms and celebrates the unique identities of young children and their families across all identities, including multilingual ELs. These practices allow the classroom to comfortably embrace and support children’s language development in both English and their home languages.

Additionally, Early MTSS practices promote high-quality inclusion and aligns beautifully with the [Early Care and Education Environment Indicators and Elements of High-Quality Inclusion](#) developed by the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA), a consortium of national experts from multiple organizations funded through the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. This resource has been recently developed and details the key elements necessary for promoting high-quality inclusive policies, procedures, and practices in early care and education environments. The indicators are designed to assist teams in order to ensure the implementation of high-quality universal inclusive practices across programs for the meaningful participation and equitable access of each and every young child.

WIDA Trainings & Professional Development

It is good practice for all teachers who work with ELs to have some related professional development. As members of the WIDA Consortium, everyone working in a school district in Vermont is eligible for the self-paced online classes. Of particular interest to PreK teachers might be: Making Language Visual in the Classroom and Welcoming Newcomers. To obtain WIDA Secure Portal account to access these trainings, contact WIDA Client Services at help@wida.us or at 1-866-276-7735.

Frequently Asked Questions

Frequently asked questions about English learners/multilingual learners who are in prekindergarten:

Should PreKs be rescreened when they enter Kindergarten?

Yes, formal federal designation of EL status, and determination of the requirement for testing, begins at kindergarten. These students entering Kindergarten programs at the start of the school year should be screened again using the WIDA Screener for Kindergarten, listening and speaking domains only.

When do we enter PreK students’ Home Language Surveys into the state collection site?

If a student has been screened and identified as an EL, or as an immigrant, they should be entered into the State collection site immediately.

When PreKs enter Kindergarten, do we need to reenter the home language survey into the data collection site?

If the student continues to be enrolled in the SU/SD, whether or not they change schools, they do not need to be reentered in the database.

Should PreK EL services be included in an EL Specialist's caseload?

Whether or not PreK EL services need to be included in caseloads needs to be carefully considered at the local level and should be stated clearly in the district Lau plan.

Resources

- [WIDA Early Years Can Do Descriptors](#)
- [WIDA Guiding Principles of Language Development \(wisc.edu\)](#)
- [FocusOn-EarlyYears.pdf \(wisc.edu\)](#)
- [Preschool English Learners 2nd Edition - Child Development \(CA Dept of Education\)](#)
- [8 Strategies for Preschool ELLs' Language and Literacy Development](#)
- [Promoting Equity for Young Multilingual Children and Their Families](#)
- [Improving Language Access in Early Childhood Programs \(newamerica.org\)](#)
- [Multilingual Students and Their Families](#)
- [English Language Learners in Preschool Podcast](#)
- [Effective Teaching of Preschoolers in a Mixed Classroom](#)

Contact Information

For further information about English Learner programs, contact Stephanie Vogel, Title III and EL Programs Director, stephanie.vogel@vermont.gov

For further information about assessing English Learners, contact Heidi Jo Bartlett, heidijo.bartlett@vermont.gov

For further information about Universal PreK education, contact Wendy Scott, UPK State Coordinator, wendy.scott@vermont.gov

For further information about Early MTSS, contact Amy Murphy, Inclusion Coordinator, amy.murphy@vermont.gov