



A Union of Professionals

COVID-19 School Closures

Supporting English Language Learners During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The equitable education of English language learners (ELLs) is safeguarded by various civil rights laws and policies, as well as by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).¹ They ensure support for the language and academic development of ELLs. Here is a brief summary of each:

1. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964:

Title VI prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race, color or national origin by recipients of federal financial assistance. It has been interpreted to prohibit denial of equal access to education because of a student's limited proficiency in English.

2. Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1968):

Recognizes the unique educational disadvantages faced by non-English-speaking students. Title VII, also known as the Bilingual Education Act, established a federal policy to assist education agencies to serve students with limited English proficiency by authorizing funding to support those efforts.

3. The May 25 Memorandum (1970):

The district must take affirmative steps to rectify the language instructional needs of students in order to open the instructional program to the students.

4. Lau v. Nichols Supreme Court Ruling

(1974): The Supreme Court ruled that identical education does not constitute equal education under the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The court ruled that the district must take affirmative steps to overcome educational barriers faced by ELLs.

5. Equal Educational Opportunities Act of

1974: The statute specifically prohibits states from denying equal educational opportunity by failing to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation.

6. Plyler v. Doe Supreme Court Ruling

(1982): The court stated that undocumented immigrant children have the same right to a free public education as U.S. citizens and permanent residents. School officials may not require students to prove they are in the United States legally, and schools should avoid attempts to document students' status.

7. Dear Colleague Letter from U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (2015):

Letter to state departments of education and school districts emphasizing 10 areas that must be upheld to ensure that ELLs are receiving an equitable education and to reinforce prior rulings in favor of ELLs receiving appropriate language, academic and social supports.

The challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic are many and have forced school districts across the nation to take necessary steps not only to protect the health and safety of students, but also to address the academic, and social emotional needs of our most vulnerable students. Although distance learning quickly became the default solution for the more than 54 million students displaced by school closures, it is estimated that 25-50 percent of the 5 million ELLs around the country

either do not have the appropriate technology devices needed for online learning or access to the internet.

We are awaiting word from the U.S. Department of Education to clarify guidance and information to state and local education agencies to address the needs of ELLs under the current circumstances.

In the meantime, schools, community-based organizations and educators are springing into action to support the students and families they serve while balancing their own family responsibilities and staying safe. Children must have access to an education, food and other resources during this pandemic, and it is our expectation that ELLs will benefit from supplementary funding provided by the recent CARES (Coronavirus Assistance, Relief, and Economic Security) Act legislation. In a recent survey by the Migration Policy Institute and the National Association of English Learner Program Administrators, the following priorities for ELLs during this emergency were identified:

- Support for increasing access to technology;
- Training for teachers on instructional strategies to support ELLs in a distance/online learning environment;
- Information for ELLs and their families, in their home languages, about preventive measures to minimize the spread of COVID-19 and to stay healthy;
- Information for ELLs and their families, in their home languages, on school closures, social support measures such as meal distribution, and detailed instructions on home-based learning; and
- Specific support for ELLs from migrant farmworker families.

KEY POINTS:

- State and local education agencies must ensure compliance with all the aforementioned laws and policies, which should not prevent any school from offering educational programs through distance instruction.

- School districts must provide a free and appropriate public education consistent with the need to protect the health and safety of students with disabilities and those providing education, specialized instruction and related services to ELLs.
- School districts must ensure that instructional remediation for ELLs addresses English language proficiency lags or losses as well as advancement in academic core content subjects.

Resources

These resources and recommendations can help educators of ELLs, as well as parents and caregivers. We encourage you to check with these sites and others to learn which apps, platforms, and other resources are recommended by advocates and experts. **Note: These lists are provided as a service to our members. They are by no means exhaustive, nor does inclusion imply any product endorsement.**

SCHOOL CLOSURES:

ELL CONSIDERATIONS AND RESOURCES

The **Colorín Colorado**² links below can help schools and communities partner more effectively with multilingual families and best serve English learners during school closures. Updates will be added to this page over time.

- School Responses to COVID-19: ELL/Immigrant Considerations (bit.ly/2VfAKIy)
- Communicating with ELLs and Their Families During School Closures (bit.ly/3aULkeL)
- Distance Learning for ELLs: Privacy Considerations (bit.ly/2RnyfCX)
- Coronavirus: Multilingual Resources for Schools (bit.ly/2JRqyB2)

LITERACY AND PARENT OUTREACH

RESOURCES

- **Colorín Colorado Multilingual Literacy Tip Sheets**

bit.ly/2VdZ39V

Learn how families can support literacy at home, whether their children are babies, toddlers, preschoolers or in elementary school. These tips are available in 13 languages.

- **AFT Toolkit for Teachers: Reaching Out to Hispanic Parents of English Language Learners**

bit.ly/34I380c

The “Toolkit for Teachers: Reaching Out to Hispanic Parents of English Language Learners” was developed by Colorín Colorado, Reading Rockets, and the American Federation of Teachers. This toolkit includes background information on reaching out to Hispanic parents, four sample workshops, videos in Spanish and English, booklists and bilingual handouts. Additions to the toolkit include a new parent workshop on helping children become successful readers and 200 children’s book titles geared toward Latino families.

- **Reading Tip Sheets for Educators**

bit.ly/3e3QqaB

Providing a solid foundation for literacy is critical. These tip sheets focus on reading instruction for educators of English language learners in grades 4-12. They include information on what to do first, vocabulary instruction and age-appropriate reading strategies. They are available in English and Spanish.

WEBSITES

- **Center for Applied Linguistics**

bit.ly/34mcngx

- **Edutopia**

edut.to/34msmv0

- **Larry Ferlazzo’s Websites of the Day Blog**

larryferlazzo.edublogs.org/

- **Linguasorb Blog**

bit.ly/2xW8we6

- **National Association for Bilingual Education**

bit.ly/2RCIB2f

- **National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition**

ncela.ed.gov/

- **SupportEd**

getsupported.net/

- **National Association of School Psychologists**

tinyurl.com/v4lynwe

Parent guide, helping children cope with changes resulting from COVID-19 (various languages)

- **Wide Open School**

wideopenschool.org/

WEBINARS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

- **Practical Strategies and Resources to Teach K-12 English Language Learners Online**

Available On Demand

Presented by SupportEd

bit.ly/2x4qafN and bit.ly/2xZCIVE

During uncertain times with districts closing out of an abundance of caution to slow the spread of COVID-19, teachers are being called to quickly figure out how to teach ELLs in an online format. Watch this webinar with ELL online educator Eugenia Krimmel as she shares and models strategies for teaching K-12 ELLs in an online setting.

- **You Are Welcome Here: Supporting the Social and Emotional Needs of Newcomer Immigrant Students**

Available On Demand

Presented by Colorín Colorado

bit.ly/2JOhQmX

Watch Lydia Breiseth, Ameena Elder, Nadra Shami of Colorín Colorado and Share My Lesson to learn what it takes to help newcomer immigrant students, particularly those who have experienced trauma, succeed in their schools. One award-winning district whose example is worth studying is Dearborn Public Schools in Michigan, where nearly half of the students are English language learners—and where the graduation rate, including ELLs, is among the highest in the state.

- **#ELLChat on twitter**

bit.ly/2UU8GvK

ELL educator online community; Twitter chats every Monday at 9 p.m. Eastern time

PODCASTS

- **Podcast Recommendations to Improve Your ESL Teaching**

bit.ly/3e5zjoW

Recommendations

Challenges for this nation’s educators and school personnel are unprecedented. Yet, we are rising to the occasion. More than 60 million children, including private school students, are no longer attending school and it appears unlikely they will return this school year. Most of these children will access some form of learning via a distance learning program or some iteration of remote learning. It is essential that districts and schools consider all the circumstances that may exacerbate the challenges ELLs may have in accessing remote learning. While access to technology and appropriate equipment top the list, ELLs may also be in difficult situations where they may have food or housing insecurity issues due to their families’ loss of income,³ lack of transportation,

or are providing child care for younger siblings or, if they’re older, having to work to support their families. They may also be afraid to access medical, internet or other basic services due to their immigration status, or feel isolated because they come from a low-incidence language group, which may also not have a written form. Please also keep in mind that xenophobic incidents have increased during this time, particularly against families of Chinese and Asian descent resulting in added anxiety, fear, isolation and stress for immigrant families. Bullying and harassment of any kind should not be tolerated.

For a comprehensive look at how districts and schools can ensure that ELLs and their families are included in all communications and school closure plans related to COVID-19, in addition to how to approach distance learning for ELLs, see the “School Responses to COVID-19: ELL/Immigrant Considerations” (bit.ly/2VfAKIy) article on Colorín Colorado (bit.ly/2xgmmrD). Here are some considerations from that article that can help individual educators, schools and districts:

- Ensure that students are receiving reminders on preventive measures regularly, as well as recommendations if they get sick.
- Encourage teachers and paraprofessionals to use visuals, videos and demonstrations with ELLs on steps like hand-washing and that they check students’ understanding of that information.
- Ensure that families know to be especially careful with vulnerable populations such as grandparents who may be caregivers or live with their families.
- Ensure that families receive this key information as well. Keep in mind that families will have different preferences on how they wish to communicate:
 - **Phone calls and texts.** Many families may prefer to communicate via phone and text. If your school has not established regular communication with ELL families, this is a good time to start. You can find recommendations for getting started in our ELL family outreach guide (bit.ly/3bXlrda). While in-person communication is always preferred, you may want to experiment with apps that translate for families, such

as Talking Points, which uses a combination of human and automatic translation. Families do not have to download an app to use Talking Points—they receive text messages in their language. (Note that Google Translate is best for words and phrases, not extended conversations, and even with translations of specific words, the translations may not be perfect.)

- **Translated information.** Many COVID-19 resources have already been translated into other languages. Check with your local public health office to see if it has information serving the immigrant families in your community. You may also want to see if there are existing multilingual resources online, such as those compiled by Colorín Colorado (bit.ly/2VdZ39V). Note: Families with lower levels of literacy may not be able to read written handouts. Make information available in a variety of forms if possible.
- **Community networks and media outlets.** Some immigrant communities may have robust communication networks within parent groups, with local organizations, or through media outlets in their language. Collaborating with these networks can provide a valuable two-way benefit both in sharing information and learning more about families' questions, concerns and ideas.

Our recommendations:

- Stay safe! Follow the recommended Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Guidance for Schools (bit.ly/3buCYuo).
- Stay informed of your state and district policies and guidelines.
- Monitor local news for updates on closures, curfews and essential assembly ordinances.
- Check your email appropriately—if you have contractual or work requirements governing the number of hours or how often you should check work email, please adhere to those guidelines.
- Know work expectations if you have any. If you are responsible for supporting ELLs, consider the following:
 - How many students can you reasonably support?
 - What does internet access look like for these students?
 - What does your access look like? Keep a record of the time you are working each day and what you are doing.
 - What are the accommodations/supports for the students you are working with?
 - Which students are you unable to support? What does offline support look like for these students or students for whom an online platform is not appropriate? How will this material be provided to these students?
 - What will work measurement look like over time?
 - How much time will students need to reasonably complete assignments? Some ELL educators are reporting that their students and families are overwhelmed by multiple time-intensive assignments on varying platforms.
- What is the record-keeping mechanism for this transition period?
- How will this information be articulated to other team members?
- Establish a routine for yourself that includes taking breaks for personal care, meals, physical activity and emotional well-being.
- Connect with other practitioners as appropriate—grade-level peers, related service providers, community/advocacy agencies in online communities to exchange/share ideas; however, confidentiality must be maintained at all times.
- Help protect the civil rights of all students. Stop any bullying or harassment when it happens.
- Inform your students' parents and peers of your "working hours"; this may be established by your district, however, an email communication may be needed to remind others of your availability.

- Take advantage of the many free virtual learning opportunities currently offered by colleges, universities, technology companies and other entities, many of which are offering badges, certificates and “freemium” access to technology products.
- Learn more about the approved technical platforms from your district, as well as privacy policies regarding online learning and safeguards for immigrant students. If you need additional support or training from your district, ask for it. Other educators may benefit from this support as well!

Find more information at



American Federation of Teachers
www.aft.org/coronavirus



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sharemy
lesson

Share My Lesson
**[sharemylesson.com/
coronavirus/remote](http://sharemylesson.com/coronavirus/remote)**

1 **<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/equity-essa-report>**

2 **Colorín Colorado** is the most widely used online platform nationwide for educators and families of ELLs on what works; it is a collaborative project of the AFT and PBS Station WETA.

3 Undocumented families may not be eligible for assistance from the CARES Act legislation.