Distance Learning for English Learners:

Needs Assessment

This needs assessment will help you identify priorities as you plan distance learning for English learners (ELs). It accompanies the following articles:

* [Distance Learning: Planning Online Instruction for English Learners](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/distance-learning-english-learners-planning-instruction)
* [Offline Learning for ELs: Ideas for Supporting Learning at Home](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/offline-learning-ells-ideas-supporting-learning-home)

You may wish to complete the survey in collaboration with colleagues, particularly when discussing groups of students across a class, grade, school, or district. However, the questions can help guide planning for individual students or small groups as well.

You may also wish to read through all of the topics first or choose the most relevant topics for your situation. Some of the later sections on students and families might help inform earlier sections on instruction. Feel free to adjust this document and post it to a shared workspace as needed.

Finally, as you plan instruction, remember to keep the focus on academic learning and to avoid providing only skills-based activities. You can also look for connections to students’ experiences and cultures through [culturally relevant instruction](https://www.colorincolorado.org/culturally-responsive-resources).

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**Related Resources**

* [School Responses to COVID-19: ELL/Immigrant Considerations](https://www.colorincolorado.org/coronavirus-ell)
* [Communicating with ELLs and Their Families During School Closures](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/coronavirus-ells-families)
* [Distance Learning for ELLs: Privacy Considerations](https://www.colorincolorado.org/distance-learning-ells-privacy)
* [Coronavirus: Multilingual Resources for Schools](https://www.colorincolorado.org/coronavirus)

**Strengths and Challenges**

Here are examples of strengths and challenges that may help with your brainstorming.

* **Strength:** Teachers know students and content standards/benchmarks well.
* **Challenge:** Teachers are uncertain of how to revise expectations for adequate instructional expectations in this distance learning format. Things that work in class may not work in a virtual learning environment.
* **Strength:** Student has support from family and older siblings have a 1:1 electronic device and use it for school. They can help the student at home.
* **Challenge:** Student was struggling with reading so too much written work may be difficult.
* **Strength:** Teacher was using classroom app to share class activities so teacher and students are familiar with it as a learning tool.
* **Challenge:** Teacher hasn’t used the app for instructing virtually and it’s difficult to know how to present a lesson and have students engage in learning.

**Part I: Reflection**

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| **Reflection Questions** |
| Before diving in, it may be helpful for individuals and teams to consider these questions. |
| What are your hopes for this experience, both for you and your students? |
| When you think about distance learning, what are examples of the following that come to mind for your situation?   * Strengths * Challenges * Areas of growth * Possible opportunities |
| Do you feel anxious about this process? If so, about what? Who can provide extra support now and during the rest of the school year? |

**Part II: Instruction and Collaboration**

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| **Tools for Instruction** | |
| It’s helpful to take stock of your instructional tools:   * **Offline:** Tech-free options might include paper packet delivery to bus stops and books included with school meals. Phone options might include phone calls, texts, and video sharing. * **Online:** Online options might include platforms such as Google Classroom. | |
| What kinds of tools do you have available for delivering instruction? Will you be using offline tools, online tools, or a combination of both? | |
| Which digital tools/protocols have been vetted and approved by the district? | |
| What kind of training is available for these tools? | |
| What is your familiarity with these tools? What system is most comfortable for you? | |
| How familiar are students with the devices/platforms they will be using? | |
| How much support from educators/parents will students need to use the platforms? | |
| What are some lessons learned since school closures took effect? | |
| What information have you received from the district about the following?   * Distance learning plans / expectations * How EL instruction is aligned to this plan * How districtwide EL programming reflects remote learning options * How to [protect students’ privacy online,](https://www.colorincolorado.org/distance-learning-ells-privacy) especially for immigrant students | |
| **Strengths/Relevant Experience:** | **Challenges:** |
| **Staff Collaboration/Partners:** | **Questions:** |
| **Resources:** | **Next Steps:** |

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| **Planning Instruction** | |
| This section can be used by individuals or teams. You may wish to use multiple copies of this section for different classes or content areas. | |
| Class/Subject: | |
| What standards are you going to address? | |
| What benchmarks will you plan for? | |
| How often and in what ways will you interact with student learning? For example, you might:   * upload a module for the week and then check in occasionally * interact daily with students * be available by phone for student questions and assistance * set virtual “office hours” when you respond to questions. | |
| How do you plan to support the four domains of language (reading, writing, speaking, and language)? Note that oral language development is particularly critical as students are missing interactions with their peers and educators. | |
| How much language support or how many scaffolded supports do students need in their distance learning? | |
| How will you provide different tasks or scaffolded support for students with different English language proficiency levels through strategies such as the following?   * modified tasks * organizing platform tools to provide choice * scaffolded supports | |
| How will you create an engaging distance learning lesson for multilingual students? Some options might include: projects, video clips, or cultural connections. | |
| How might you connect lessons to students’ personal experiences and use other culturally responsive practices? | |
| Assessing student learning:   * How will you assess student learning? * Will it be verbal or written? * What methods will you use? * How frequently will you provide feedback? | |
| Evaluation/grading:   * How will lesson activities be evaluated? * Will students receive grades from this work? * What are the consequences if students do not do the assignment? | |
| What supports and services will be provided for dually-identified students (ELLs with special education services)? | |
| As you think about your own work flow for lesson planning, consider the following:   * How much work is it for you to create engaging distance learning lessons? * How can you streamline the process? * What is sustainable for you in your planning across your class schedule? | |
| Which staff members work most regularly with ELs? Do they have recommendations or insights on planning instruction? | |
| What other lessons have you or colleagues learned so far about effective distance learning? | |
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| **Collaboration** | |
| Collaboration is critical for English learners’ success. In addition, school closures can provide some unique and new opportunities to work together. Here are some ideas on how to embed more collaboration into your practice. You can see more ideas for EL collaboration in our [related resource section](https://www.colorincolorado.org/teaching-ells/role-esl-teachers/collaboration). | |
| What are some successes you have had collaborating on behalf of ELs this year? | |
| What kind of collaboration would be most beneficial to your students currently? What are some first steps you could take towards increasing collaboration? (You may wish to adapt this idea of sending a [letter out to colleagues](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/collaboration-strategy-ell-educators-sending-introductory-letter-colleagues-and-families) describing your role and how you can support their learners.) | |
| Are you aware of any collaborative teams doing the following currently? If so, you may wish to ask them to share ideas or collaboration tools.   * co-planning lessons * co-teaching * collaborating on behalf of certain classes or students | |
| What is the process by which information is shared with the students other teachers (especially for secondary students)? How can that be improved for distance learning? | |
| What kinds of access do paraprofessionals or liaisons/interpreters have to technology and Internet? What is their level of comfort working online? | |
| What kinds of networks/PLCs are available to educators, either through the school, district, or online? | |
| What opportunities for collaboration does distance learning provide? | |
| What are some obstacles? | |
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**Part III: Partnering with Students and Families**

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| **Student workload** | |
| As you plan student assignments for your students or in collaboration with colleagues, consider the amount of time that students can reasonably spend on their schoolwork while at home. They may:   * have limited access to technology or quiet space * have other significant responsibilities such as caring for younger siblings or relatives, or even working outside of the home * complete assignments in the evening even if they can’t connect during the day.   One mother shared with an ESL teacher that she was **more concerned about the amount of schoolwork her child had been assigned than the virus itself.** You may be able to play an important role in helping colleagues adjust their expectations of what students can manage at home. | |
| What grade levels are your students? | |
| What are your students’ English language proficiency levels? (If you need a place to gather EL student information, consider using the form referenced [this article](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/10-things-you-need-learn-about-your-english-language-learners).) | |
| How much time will students be expected to engage in learning each day? What is reasonable for your students? | |
| Do students have other responsibilities such as caring for siblings? | |
| Are students receiving assignments from multiple teachers (especially for secondary levels)? Is the workload sustainable? | |
| What level of ability do your EL students have to work independently? | |
| If you have students w/ interrupted education, what supports might they need? | |
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| **Technology/Internet Access** | |
| Students’ access to devices and Internet connections vary widely. The more familiar are with your students’ situations, the better you will be able to help them be successful in distance learning and help the district provide strategic support. | |
| Has your district done a technology survey of EL families? If so, do all educators of ELs have access to the most relevant information to help guide instructional choices? | |
| If your district has not done a survey, do you need to do one for your EL families? If so, how can it be administered to families without Internet (i.e., via phone calls)? | |
| **What you need to know:**   * Do students have access to a device at home? If so, what kind of device? * Are there multiple children in the home sharing a device? * Are students familiar with using computers or devices? (Newcomers or students with interrupted education may not be.) * Do students have access to a reliable Internet connection? * Are there other resources such as hot spots or free Wi-Fi access? * Are Internet providers offering free connections locally?   (Note that rural areas may not have reliable connections and some families may be reluctant to use such a service if they request a Social Security number, require no “past due” bills, or provide complicated instructions in English.) | |
| Can your district can provide any of the technology families need? | |
| Does the district provide troubleshooting for the device if there are basic functionality issues? (Many large districts have the capability to provide hotlines support devices but in rural communities this may not be the case.) | |
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| **Family Engagement During Distance Learning** | |
| Families are crucial partners for all students’ distance learning and particularly for ELs. These questions identify some areas of focus for collaboration with families. For more tips on connecting with EL families during school closures, see our [related article](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/coronavirus-ells-families). | |
| How have you or other teachers connected with EL families throughout the year? | |
| What is already working? (phone calls, digital apps, social media, strong relationships with family liaisons, etc.) | |
| What do you know about families’ preferred methods of communication (phone, text, email, etc.)? This may vary among families. | |
| How successful has the school been in contacting EL families since school closures? | |
| What is the literacy level of your EL families? | |
| Do some families need oral instructions and others written translations? | |
| Who is providing the translations for the more uncommon languages? | |
| Have families received directions about the following?   * how/when to complete learning with the school’s distance learning tools * available technology for their use and information on troubleshooting   How is this information being disseminated to families and the community? | |
| Which staff members work regularly with the ELs and families? Do they have recommendations or insights for partnering with EL families? Who else is part of the greater network of support for EL families in the school or district? | |
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