

Identification of English Learners

When families register their children in District Homer 33c for the first time, one of the papers they fill out is a Home Language Survey. This Survey asks two questions:

1. Is a language other than English spoken in your home?
2. Does your child speak a language other than English?

If the answer to either of these questions is "Yes" then the student must be assessed for English language proficiency. This is generally done within the first few weeks of a child attending school.

English Language Proficiency Screening

If a student has been identified through the Home Language Survey as needing to be screened for English Proficiency, EL / Bilingual staff in the student's school will screen the child with one of the following screening tools:

1. Pre-K students are screened with a test called the Pre-IPT which tests speaking and listening in English.
2. Kindergarten students and first semester 1st grade students are screened with the WIDA Screener for K which tests speaking and listening in English.
3. Second semester 1st grade students through 8th grade are screened using the WIDA online screener which tests reading, writing, speaking, and listening in English.

A student may be exempt from screening if one of the following is verified:

1. If the student comes with ACCESS scores or screening scores from their previous district, those scores will be used for placement instead of screening. The scores must be from the most recent school year.

2. If the student has previously met the State of Illinois's exit requirements from EL programs.
3. If the student meets ALL of this criteria:
 1. Resides in a home where language other than English is spoken, AND
 2. Has not previously been screened or identified as an English learner, AND
 3. Has been in general education classes in their previous school, AND
 4. Has been performing at or above grade level as evidenced by having met or exceeded Illinois Learning Standards in reading and math on the student's most recent State Assessment, or a nationally normed standardized test as long as the student did not receive any English learner accommodations.

If the student is determined to be "not proficient" then the student is eligible for placement into an EL / Bilingual program that is most appropriate for their needs.

Waiving/Refusing Services: Parents who wish to waive EL / Bilingual services for their students must submit a signed letter indicating that they do not want EL services. They may change their mind at any time and ask for their student to be placed in an EL/bilingual program after waiving services.

Students who do not receive EL services because the parents waive MUST STILL TAKE THE ACCESS TEST EACH YEAR until they reach proficiency which the State of Illinois has set as a score of 4.8 composite on the ACCESS test.

Special Education and EL

Dual Eligible students are those students who qualify for English Learner (EL) / Bilingual services and Special Education services. The level of EL / Bilingual services that a student will receive is determined in a student's IEP (Individualized Education Plan) meeting by EL staff, Special Education staff, parents, and any other specialist that may be part of that student's IEP team.

The EL / Bilingual teachers and Special Ed teachers will then meet to determine how services will be implemented in such a way as to ensure that the student receives both services, as mandated by state and federal law.

All Dual Eligible students, including those whose parents have waived EL services, will take the ACCESS test on a yearly basis as mandated by state law. Accommodations listed on the student's IEP will be followed during ACCESS administration. In some cases, students may take the Alternate ACCESS in place of the ACCESS test depending on the severity of their disability.

Dual Eligible students must meet the same Exit Criteria that is used for all English Learners, a score of 4.8 or higher on the ACCESS test.

The ACCESS test

The ACCESS test is a secure English language proficiency test given annually to all students in grades K-12 who have been identified as English Learners (ELs). Students are assessed in the four language domains of Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking. The ACCESS test is only administered during the annual test window for the state of Illinois. Based on the results of this assessment, the student will be assigned an English proficiency level. That level will be used to

determine what EL Support services the student will receive at his/her school. Once a student receives a composite score of 4.8 or higher they are considered proficient in English and may exit the program.

Students whose parents have waived English learner services are still required by the State of Illinois to take the ACCESS test annually until they demonstrate sufficient English proficiency.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why does my child need English learner (EL) services?

EL / Bilingual services are important to supporting the student in their regular classes in English. This support helps the student's acquisition of academic English in the areas of math, science, social studies, and language arts, which is important for continued academic achievement. EL / Bilingual services are provided through a pull-out and push-in model.

2. How do I know if my child needs EL / Bilingual services?

Every child who enrolls for the first time in Homer School District 33c is given a Home Language Survey. If the parent notes that the family speaks a language other than English at home, or that the child speaks a language other than English, we will assess the child's English language proficiency with a screening test. If the results of this test show that the child needs English Learner services, he/she will be placed in a program.

3. My child speaks English very well; he/she talks to friends all the time in English, and watches TV and movies in English, so why does he/she still need EL services?

Your child may speak English very well in certain types of social situations, but may need additional support in order to learn academic vocabulary needed for reading and writing in English at advanced levels. Academic English takes much more time to acquire and master than social language. For this reason we strongly encourage parents to keep their children in EL / Bilingual programming until they no longer need services as determined by yearly ACCESS testing.

4. What is the ACCESS test?

The ACCESS test is an English language proficiency assessment given to Kindergarten through 12th graders who have been identified as English Learners (ELs). It is given annually in January and February to monitor students' progress in acquiring academic English. Based on the results of this assessment your child will be assigned an English proficiency level. That level will be used to determine what EL / Bilingual support services your child needs or they will be exited from the EL / Bilingual program. You will receive a copy of your child's ACCESS scores each year.

5. How long will it take to exit from EL / Bilingual services?

It is difficult to predict how long a student will take in order to reach English proficiency. Research shows that it may take from 5 to 10 years, depending on the child. Every student is different and will progress at different rates. A student exits the program when they receive a composite score of 4.8 or higher on the ACCESS test.

6. Can my child receive Special Education and EL / Bilingual services at the same time?

Yes. All special education students who are also eligible for EL / Bilingual services receive both as mandated by state and federal law.