English Learners
District Plan
2026-2027

MERIDIAN
PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT

Legal Foundations

Statutory foundation: Mississippi and federal statutes mandate the necessity for school districts to establish services for English Learners (ELs) that are non-discriminatory and based on pedagogically sound educational theory and practice. It is the school district's responsibility to comply with all legal mandates related to English Learners. Meridian Public School District (MPSD) is committed to providing all English Learners full access to the district's instructional programs and the assistance needed to become proficient in academic English.

Educational Theory and Approach

Teaching English to second language learners is not as daunting as it may seem; many people have the misconception that an educator must be fluent in the students' native languages in order to teach them. However, exercises that involve repetition and basic language theory can be used to successfully teach students whose first language is not English. It is also important that teachers have a strong command and understanding of the English language and that they use a variety of resources to communicate the basics of word recognition, phonetics, tenses, grammar and reading comprehension.

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) has utilized the services of WestEd and the Understanding Language Initiative at Stanford University to develop a new set of English Language Proficiency (ELP) Standards. The ELP Standards, developed for K, 1, 2-3, 4-5, 6-8, and 9-12 grades, highlight and amplify the critical language, knowledge about language, and skills using language that are in college-and-career-ready standards and that are necessary for English language learners (ELLs) to be successful in schools. The 10 ELP Standards highlight a strategic set of language functions (what students do with language to accomplish content-specific tasks) and language forms (vocabulary, grammar, and discourse specific to a particular content area or discipline) which are needed by ELLs as they develop competence in the practices associated with English language arts (ELA) & literacy, mathematics, and science (Bunch, Kiber, & Pimentel, 2013; CCSSO, 2012; Lee, Quinn, & Valdez, 2013; Moschkovich, 2012; van Lier & Walqui, 2012). The five ELP levels for each of the ELP Standards address the question, "What might an ELL's language use look like at each ELP level as he or she progresses toward independent participation in grade-appropriate activities?"

Definition of an English Learner

According to ESSA, an EL is defined as an individual:

- who is aged 3 through 21; § who is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary school or secondary school;
- who was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English;
- who is a Native American or Alaska Native, or a native resident of the outlying areas; and

- who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual's level of English language proficiency; or
- who is migratory, whose native language is a language other than English, and who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; and
- whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual —
    - the ability to meet the State's proficient level of achievement on State assessments;
    - the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or
    - the opportunity to participate fully in society.

Definition of an Immigrant

According to the ESEA, an Immigrant:

- is ages 3 through 21
- was not born in any state or U.S. territory
- and has not been attending one or more schools in any one or more states for more than three full academic years.

Types of English Learners and Their Characteristics

Type of English Learner	their Characteristics
Newly Arrived with Adequate Schooling	• Recent arrivals (less than 3 years in the United States) • Adequate schooling in native country • Catch up academically with relative ease • May still score lower on standardized testing due to need for English language acquisition
Newly Arrived with Limited Formal Schooling	• Recent arrivals • Interrupted or limited schooling in native country • Limited native language literacy • Below grade level in math • Poor academic achievement

Long-Term English Learner	• Below grade level in reading and writing Mismatch between student perception of achievement and actual grades • Some have adequate proficiency but score low on tests • Have had EL instruction, but inconsistent instructional models

Identification of Potential ELs

Educational decision making for ELs requires procedures for identification, assessment, and proper program placement. The MDE, in conjunction with federal guidelines regarding ELs, provide the guidance LEAs need to identify, assess, and place students into an appropriate language instruction educational program.

The identification and placement of ELs in an appropriate language program that assures them of an equitable, quality education is a four-step process.
Step 1 – Home Language Survey
Step 2 – Initial Assessment of Language Proficiency
Step 3 – Parental Notification
Step 4 – Program Placement
Step 5- Developing an LSP

Step 1 – Registration and Home Language Survey (HLS)

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VI, Language Minority Compliance Procedure requires LEAs to identify Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. The Mississippi Department of Education has selected the Home Language Survey (HLS) as the tool to identify LEP students. The purpose of this survey is to determine if there is a primary language other than English spoken in the home. Schools have a responsibility under federal law to serve students who are LEP and in need of ESL or bilingual instruction in order to be successful in core academic subjects. Given this responsibility, the District has the right to ask for the information they need to identify these students.

The district will require documents during the registration process: proof of residency within the district and proof of required vaccinations. If these two documents are provided the student may enroll. School personnel will not require parents to disclose their immigration status nor require social security numbers (Plyer v. Doe, 1982 Supreme Court Decision). A student number will be assigned to all students regardless of whether they possess a social security card or not.

The HLS is part of the district's registration process. The parent or guardian of all students must complete the HLS at the time of initial enrollment into a Mississippi school, and the HLS becomes part of the student's permanent record through the student's graduation. It may be helpful to conduct an interview with the student and/or parents during the enrollment process.

Step 2 – Initial Assessment of Language Proficiency

Conduct an initial assessment of English language proficiency to determine the level of English proficiency and to facilitate appropriate instructional and program placement decisions. A student whose HLS indicates the presence of a language other than English must be assessed for English-language proficiency within thirty (30) days of enrollment at the beginning of the school year. Assess students who register after the beginning of the school year within two (2) weeks of enrollment.
The Placement Test helps determine eligibility for placement in the District's English language development program. The Placement test assesses English language proficiency in all four domains of language development: listening, speaking, reading, and writing to ensure that student's language needs are properly identified and addressed through the District's educational program. This screening tool is used to determine whether a child is eligible for English language instructional services. If determined that the student needs services, the student is classified as EL in the district's student identification system.

The Placement test yields an overall composite score, which corresponds to a Proficiency Level based on the language domains tested. Students whose proficiency level is **Emerging** or **Progressing** are eligible for EL services. Students whose proficiency level is **Proficient** will not be considered an English Learner and will not receive services.

Students who were previously enrolled in another Mississippi LEA or another state with the same placement test may not need to be assessed with the current Mississippi Placement Test, providing they have test results available for review.

The Placement test should be considered as only one piece of evidence in the decision-making process regarding placement of students in grades K-12. A teacher's best professional judgment, other assessments, and extenuating circumstances, such as the student's age and amount and quality of previous schooling, should be considered when making decisions for educational instructional services.

Step 3 – Parental Notification

Prior to the initial placement of a student in a language instruction educational program, the LEA or school must notify the student's parents or guardians. Parents are not required to respond to the notification in order for the student to participate in the LEA's language instructional program; parents do have the right to waive Language Instruction Educational Program and

remove their child from the district's English Language Instructional Program. However, if a student has been classified as an EL, based on the HLS and the ELPT the student is still required, by federal law (Section 3122 and Section 1116 of NCLB) to take the ELP assessment until the student has tested proficient in English.

Step 4 – English as a Second Language Program Placement

ELs come to school not only to learn how to communicate socially, but to become academically proficient in English. Learning social English is just the tip of the iceberg. Just because they can speak on the playground, talk to peers, and use everyday English does not mean that they are up to speed in academic English. To the contrary, these ELs are not yet proficient enough to handle the standards-based curriculum. They lack the academic vocabulary needed to develop the content knowledge in English that they will need to succeed in future schooling. By recognizing these two types of proficiencies, you can help expedite your ELs' academic English through program placement.

The first rule for assigning English Learners in an educational program is that students should be placed at the age appropriate grade level (per Office for Civil Rights Guidelines).

Grade Level: K-8

Students will be placed in grades according to chronological age in grades K-8.

> *Note: There are some situations that allow for exceptions to the general rule. If a student is not much older than six and has not been in a school before, it is often best to place the student in kindergarten. If an EL student is developmentally delayed or has suffered serious deprivation, then the EL students may need to be placed at a lower grade level. In any event, EL students will never be more than a year behind their age appropriate grade (per MDE).*

Grade Level: 9 - 12

High School age students will be enrolled in high school as long as they are under 21 years of age. In cases where graduation will not be possible by age 21, the parents and students will be informed of other options (GED classes, Adult Basic Education, etc.) by the guidance counselor or EL teacher. If parents proceed in enrolling the student in high school, the fact that the student will not be able to graduate due to lack of course credit will be fully explained. An interpreter may be needed for this purpose. **No student will be denied the opportunity to attend high school so long as he/she is less than 21 years of age.** Students with no academic records will be placed in the ninth grade. If records are received at a later date, the transcript will be evaluated to determine academic course credit and the student will be reassigned to appropriate classes and grade levels. The guidance counselor or a person trained in transcript evaluation will interview the student to determine the length of time the student spent in each class per week. Course credit will be awarded to the amount of credit awarded for contact hours as outlined by the Carnegie Unit Standards.

All ELs will participate in the Mississippi Statewide Assessment System as required by state and federal regulations. This includes the yearly administration of the ELPT in the spring. Results of the ELPT will be available to parents and students during the first nine weeks of the new school year. Parent reports are available in English and Spanish. A Spanish language interpreter can be available to translate MAAP scores if the parent wishes.

Step 5 – Developing a Language Service Plan (LSP)

The Mississippi Department of Education requires each student designated as an EL to have a Language Service Plan (LSP), which must be updated annually until the student exits the EL program. The Student Evaluation Team (SET) must meet to develop the LSP at the beginning of each academic school year. This team must be composed of teachers (including EL teachers), administrators, counselors, and parents or guardians. The team will meet quarterly to evaluate the student's progress and make necessary adjustments. A copy of the LSP must be provided to all teachers who work with the EL student.

The LSP must contain the following:

- Student's demographic information
- Date of first enrollment in a U.S. school
- Yearly ELPT scores
- Classroom accommodations
- State testing accommodations
- Signatures of SET members

Grading English Language Learners

As students are working to learn English during the initial stages of language acquisition, it is a violation of their Civil Rights to retain them due to limited language proficiency. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI) and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA), schools must ensure that EL students are placed appropriately and can participate meaningfully and equally in educational programs. Districts are required to take steps to ensure that students are not retained solely because they are still in the early stages of learning English. Students who receive extensive language supports and classroom accommodations must have this information noted on their report cards, and accommodations must be shared with the families of EL students to ensure that they have an understanding of true academic performance in English language proficiency.

Retention is generally not recommended for any EL. The decision to promote or retain must be made on a case-by-case basis.

Exiting Process

The SET/TST will consider MDE's exit criteria as they determine status for exiting ELs. This review will be documented. To exit EL status, EL students must post an overall score of 4 or higher overall on the LAS Links assessment. Additionally, students are required to score a 4 or higher in BOTH reading and writing to qualify for exiting. All scores must be posted on the same administration of the test and subtest scores are not allowed to be banked. Students of all grade levels K-12 are eligible to exit if they meet the LAS Links requirements. Students should be monitored for four years after they exit. Other factors to be considered in deciding whether a student should be retained in ESL classes or exited from them include the following:

- Standardized test scores
- Academic achievement as measured by classroom assignments and tests
- Student classroom observations
- Interviews with the student
- Length of time in school
- Student's educational background
- Academic Record (report card)
    - o District Assessments
    - o MDE Benchmarks
    - o Universal Screening

Note: Students are required to pass the subject area tests in order to receive a regular high school diploma. Graduation requirements are determined by the year the students entered the ninth grade.

During the required four year monitoring period, the student is no longer considered LEP or an EL. He/she will no longer need accommodations or modifications and will not take the state approved English Language Proficiency test. When a student exits, he/she will not longer be counted in the LEP subgroup.

If during the two year monitoring period indicators arise that the student is not being successful, support services may again be offered based on student needs. Services could be limited to a specific domain area of listening, speaking, reading, or writing; or, if necessary, the student could return to EL language program services.

Monitoring - 4 years

ELs who have exited the LEP subgroup will be monitored by classroom teachers as well as EL tutors. Monitoring the students' progress will include

- Classroom grades
- Standardized tests

- Communicating with classroom teachers as needed
- Communicating with the exited students as needed
- Communicating with parents as needed

Students' grades will documented each 9 weeks. All communication will be documented.

Services and Instructional Supports Supports provided to EL Students

English Learners in the Meridian Public School district have access to grade-level curriculum, as well as EL Supports provided by the EL team.

English as a Second Language (ESL) Pull-Out – Based on an established schedule, English language learners are pulled from their mainstream classrooms for a portion of the day to receive instruction in English language development either individually or in small groups. This program model is used at all grade levels (Grades Pre-K-12). Since the program emphasizes both academic language and social language proficiency, the EL tutors base their curricular materials and resources on English language proficiency standards established by:
• Meridian Public School District (MPSD)
• MDE approved ELP standards

Newcomers Class- This class is created based on need. If a student in grades 6-12 has been in an English speaking school for less than 2 years and has scored Not Proficient upon screening OR the overall score on the most recent annual assessment was Beginning or Early Intermediate, then the student can be considered for the Newcomer class. This class will be formed only if there are enough students in grades 6-8 and 9-12.

MTSS

If the student continues to struggle, the next option is to refer the student to the Teacher Support Team (TST) for possible intervention. It is essential that the EL teacher be involved or consulted at each step of the tier process. This is imperative before making recommendations for intervention strategies. Teams must collaboratively determine if the mainstream teachers' instructional techniques are known to be effective with ELs, as well as whether or not teachers have implemented the recommended EL instructional accommodations.

EL Teachers

MPSD makes every effort to recruit and retain highly-qualified teachers who are qualified to provide EL services to students. Even when teachers already hold an ELL license, it is expected that MPSD will provide all teachers and paraprofessionals with ongoing PD designed to improve effectiveness. All staff, including bilingual paraprofessionals, are required to speak English proficiently. Paraprofessionals who work with ELs also must receive appropriate PD to build

effectiveness. Paraprofessionals, aides, or tutors may not take the place of qualified teachers and may be used only as an interim measure while the school district hires, trains, or otherwise secures enough qualified teachers to serve its EL students. Paraprofessional must be under the supervision of a teacher.

General Education Teachers and Professional Development

ELs should have meaningful access to the core curriculum, such as math, science, social studies and language arts, while learning English. While the district's EL program should focus in part on language acquisition, both EL teachers and academic teachers should work together to ensure that students are mastering the academic language needed to be successful. Every classroom teacher who serves ELs should work to help ELs make sense of the Mississippi College and Career Readiness Standards, regardless of language proficiency. As part of this expectation, teachers must incorporate a variety of EL strategies into instructional planning to help students make sense of academic content. Teachers should use visual supports to help build student understanding. Additionally, teachers must understand the basic communication strategies to be used with ELs. All teachers and paraprofessionals who work with ELs in any capacity should recognize that they need to speak slowly and clearly (not loudly). Educators also should be aware that ELs typically need additional processing time when being introduced to new material or being asked to respond to questions. Teachers also should recognize the value that collaborative learning has for ELs, including strategies such as assigning peer buddies and language buddies for assignments with high- language demands, think-pair-share activities and the incorporation of sentence starters, sentence frames and word banks to support production during collaboration. Professional Development and PLCs will be provided to schools on an as-needed basis.

Communication with Parents

Successful communication provides LEP parents, guardians, and families with the school-related information they need to make informed decisions about, and be helpful participants in, their children's education. This may include but not be limited to information about language assistance programs, special education and related services, Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, grievance procedures, notices of nondiscrimination, student discipline policies and procedures, registration and enrollment, report cards, requests for parent or guardian permission for student participation in district or school activities, parent-teacher conferences, parent handbooks, gifted programs, and magnet and charter schools. MPSD will provide language assistance to LEP parents effectively with appropriate, competent staff or appropriate and competent outside resources. To provide these services, MPAD may survey or canvas staff to see if they are trained and qualified to provide effective language assistance, or obtain qualified interpreters and translators if staff is unqualified or if additional staffing support is needed. Students, siblings, friends and untrained staff members are not considered qualified translators or interpreters, even if they are bilingual. All interpreters and translators, including staff acting in this capacity, must be proficient in both English and the target language; have knowledge of specialized educational terms or concepts in both languages; and be trained in the role of an

interpreter or translator, and the ethics of interpreting and translating, with particular emphasis placed on the importance of maintaining student, family and staff confidentiality.

In Mississippi, one tool for providing translated notices to families is the online system TransACT. All Mississippi public school staff with email addresses can access the system, which provides hundreds of translated, ESSA-aligned forms and notifications. TransACT can be accessed at parentnotices.com

ELs and Other District Programs

MPSD operates as a School-wide, Title I district; therefore, all students have the right to participate in the full range of all programs. Services for ELs must represent a continuum of available programs and students must not be denied access to programs due to language proficiency. The EL students who meet criteria may be eligible for a variety of other specialized program services, including gifted education, advanced placement, dual credit and other advanced courses; MTSS, special education services, migrant and immigrant programs, and services for homeless students.

Determining Program Effectiveness

To determine the effectiveness of the MPSD EL program, a periodic evaluation is conducted as well as ongoing analysis of effectiveness. Student achievement data must be used to determine an EL program's effectiveness and ensure compliance with state and federal reporting requirements. An evaluation of an EL program should not be limited to required data used for accountability purposes but should instead include multiple data points. Data should be gathered, analyzed, and used to strengthen EL programs and services as appropriate. Data points that might be collected and used for evaluation include the following:

- Scores on state and local assessments
- Scores on the English Language Proficiency Test
- Rates of retention
- Exit rates
- Graduation rates
- Participation rates in gifted and advanced courses
- Enrollment rates in prekindergarten and other programs
- Enrollment rates in special education and related services
- Attendance rates
- Participation rates in extracurricular programs
- Suspension rates
- Results of parent and family, student, and teacher surveys
- Results of surveys from other key stakeholders