

Study of Practices for English Learners (SPEL)
DISTRICT Interview: Staff Member with Primary Responsibility for English Learners
Anticipated Interview Date: March 2021

District:	Interviewer:
Interviewee(s):	Date/Time:

Note to interviewer:

- *Before the interview, review the district 2020-2021 reopening plan if publicly available. If the plan features information that is relevant to protocol questions or probes, acknowledge that information to the respondent and confirm whether it is still accurate.*
- *Instructions to interviewers appear in italics.*
- *Numbered and lettered questions are all meant to be asked. Bulleted “listen for” items are possible responses and may be used as probes—the interviewer would not necessarily ask about all of these.*
- *Because some questions are open-ended, the respondent may answer a later question while answering an earlier question. Unless the respondent has fully answered all aspects of the later question, the interviewer should still ask that question but acknowledge that the respondent has already mentioned information relevant to it.*
- *Depending on the site and respondent, some participants could offer varying levels of detail for each section. Use the questions and probes as a guide but let participants respond according to their knowledge and relevant background for each section.*

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. My name is [name] and I am part of the study team from the American Institutes for Research. Just as a reminder, this interview is for a *Study of Practices for English Learners* which is funded by the U.S. Department of Education (the Department). The Department is interested in learning more about the approaches, policies, and supports used to serve English learners (ELs) in the 2020-2021 academic year in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. We will ask you questions about your role, your district context, and your district policies and approaches to serving ELs.

Before our interview today, I sent you an informed consent document. As noted in this document, our reports will combine data from a variety of respondents from your district to describe the district in a case study. Do you have any questions about the information provided in the consent form about this study or your participation? As noted in that document, we will not be identifying the names of any specific individuals who participated in this study in any of our reporting. To capture the large amount of data your responses will provide and ensure accuracy in our reporting, we would like to record this interview. The audio record may be shared with others within our study team for purposes of analysis but will not be shared outside the study team. The data from this interview, including the audio recording, transcript, and notes will be stored on a password-protected computer network and destroyed at the conclusion of the study. Is it okay if we record this conversation?

We know that you are very busy, so we have tried to collect as much information as possible through available documents. We will sometimes refer to that written information during the interview to confirm that our information is correct.

This interview will take about 60 minutes, including time for follow-up.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

DISTRICT CONTEXT

1. To start off, could you briefly describe your role in the district? What are your primary responsibilities?
2. Could you describe the English learner population in your district? What are some of the key characteristics of English learners in the district?

Probe if not mentioned:

- What are the most prevalent languages spoken at home? Approximately how many different languages are spoken?
 - Has your district(s) experienced recent changes in the size of the EL population or the composition of the types of English learners enrolling in the district?
 - Are there certain categories of English learners that your district is more challenged in serving?
 - **Listen for:** newcomers, refugees, long-term ELs, students with home languages other than the dominant languages, high school, middle school, elementary school
3. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the EL students and families in your community?

Listen for:

- € Rates of COVID-19 infection, loss of family members, family members placed at risk of infection (e.g., essential workers)
- € Job loss
- € Economic insecurity (e.g., housing and food insecurity)
- € Immigration issues (e.g., privacy concerns with online learning)
- € Lost instructional time/learning loss
- € Linguistic isolation (i.e., limited opportunities for students to practice English)
- € Barriers to remote learning (e.g., lack of technology/internet access, crowded living conditions)
- € Other _____

Probe if not mentioned:

- What implications has the pandemic had for ELs' language development and academic learning?
 - What implications has the pandemic had for ELs' social-emotional health?
4. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your district's capacity to serve ELs?

Listen for:

- € Staffing concerns
- € Budget constraints
- € Infrastructure issues
- € Other _____

EL IDENTIFICATION, EXIT, AND ASSESSMENT

I have a few questions for you about how your district has handled EL identification, reclassification, and assessment this year during the COVID-19 pandemic.

5. How has your district approached EL identification procedures during the 2020-2021 school year? Has your approach differed from prior years? If so, how?

Probe if not mentioned:

- What criteria are you using to determine whether a student is an EL?
- Have you received any guidance from your state about how to identify ELs in light of pandemic-related disruptions?
- What, if any, challenges has your district faced in identifying students as ELs this year?

Listen for:

- € Administered standardized English language proficiency assessment (e.g., WIDA, ELPA21, state-developed assessment) in person or online
- € Administered district assessment
- € Administered student questionnaire
- € Administered home language questionnaire/family interview
- € Drew on reviews of past school work/prior assessment scores
- € Drew on reviews of current school work
- € Student observations
- € Other _____

6. What procedures did your district use to determine whether ELs should exit EL status during the 2020-2021 academic year? How did this process look different from what you used prior to the pandemic?

Listen for:

- € English language proficiency assessment
- € Portfolio of student work
- € Teacher input
- € Family input
- € Other _____

Probe if not mentioned:

- How has your district monitored reclassified/former ELs this year? Has your approach differed from previous years?

7. At the start of the academic year, did your district engage in efforts to assess ELs' levels of English language proficiency? If so, how?

Listen for:

- € Administered standardized English language proficiency assessment (ie WIDA, ELPA21, etc) in person or online
- € Administered district assessment
- € Administered student questionnaire
- € Administered home language questionnaire/family interview
- € Drew on reviews of past school work/prior assessment scores
- € Other _____

Probe if not mentioned:

- What, if any, challenges did your district face in assessing student English language proficiency, and how did you address those challenges?
8. *[if district engaged in efforts to assess English proficiency]* **How did your district use information from these efforts to assess English proficiency? What steps/actions were required or recommended as follow-up on results?**

Listen for:

- € Informing EL placement or course-taking decisions
 - € Requiring development of individual academic plans for ELs
 - € Targeting capacity-building supports to schools (e.g., professional development, instructional resources)
 - € Other _____
9. **How has your district monitored EL student progress in language and content development this year? How often did such activities take place?**

Listen for:

- € District-created formative assessment
- € Using standardized ELP language practice and training tests in formative ways
- € Gathering input from ELs' families
- € Other _____

EL INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS AND SERVICES

Now, I'd like to ask you about your district's approach to EL instructional supports and services, particularly how your district has been supporting ELs' English language development and academic learning during the 2020-2021 school year.

10. **In reviewing your district 2020-2021 reopening plan, we noted that your district intended to offer the following modes of instruction [full remote learning (synchronous or asynchronous instruction), hybrid learning, full in-person learning, independent study].**
- a. **What delivery modes were offered at the start of the year? Over what period(s) of time were these modes of instruction used?**
 - b. **What modes of instruction are schools in your district currently offering now?**
 - c. **Have the offerings varied by grade level or student group at any point? If so, how?**

11. Did your district establish requirements or expectations for the minimum amount of time students should receive instruction in particular modes (either in general or in particular content areas)? Did you establish any requirements specific to ELs?

Probe if not mentioned:

- Did your district establish expectations for how much synchronous (real time) and/or in-person instruction time all students should receive? If so, how much time was expected?
- Did your district establish expectations for how much synchronous (real time) and/or in-person instruction time ELs should receive? If so, how much time was expected?
- How did you ensure teachers and schools were following these guidelines? To what extent have those expectations been met?
- Did your district prioritize ELs for synchronous and/or in-person instruction in other ways?
- Did your district use any other strategies to ensure ELs have opportunities to interact with adults and peers and practice oral language skills?

12. [if online remote learning was used] What steps did the district take to ensure students, and particularly ELs, were able to regularly access and participate in instruction conducted online?

Listen for:

- € Distribution of devices
- € Efforts to ensure internet connectivity
- € Providing access to libraries or learning hubs where students can participate in online learning
- € Systematic outreach efforts to check whether each student is equipped for online learning
- € Providing specific digital resources for ELs
- € Other _____

Probe if not mentioned:

- Did the district collect data to monitor student attendance and participation in remote learning activities (e.g., student log-ins, completion of assignments)? If yes, what type(s) of data? Was this data disaggregated for ELs? Did your district observe any differences in attendance/participation rates between ELs and other students?
- What challenges has your district faced in ensuring ELs were/are accessing and participating in online instruction?

13. How did your district adapt its instructional offerings to support ELs' English language development and academic learning during the 2020-2021 school year in light of the pandemic?

Listen for:

- € Changes or adjustments to program models
- € Changes in student grouping practices
- € Changes in curriculum
- € Changes in amount of time devoted to ELD or particular content areas (e.g., "double dose" instruction)
- € Adoption of new teaching strategies

Probe if not mentioned:

- What were the reasons for these changes? What information was used to inform them?
- How are these new strategies or supports intended to help ELs?
- How did the district support teachers and schools in implementing these changes?

14. What steps has your district taken to help teachers address possible student learning loss associated with the emergency school closures last spring? Have you taken any actions to address learning loss among ELs specifically?

- € Administered content assessment(s) at the start of the academic year
- € Provided guidance to teachers/schools on prioritizing content
- € Revised curricula or pacing guides
- € Required teacher collaboration time for vertical or horizontal alignment
- € Expanded learning time (e.g., extended day or school year)
- € Requiring double dose instruction (i.e., adding more instructional time in a particular content area where students need support, such as providing two math classes)
- € Offered supplemental supports for students (e.g., tutoring)
- € Other _____

15. Has your district made any staffing changes at the school or district level in an effort to better support ELs during the pandemic?

Probe if not mentioned:

- What types of changes?
- How were these changes intended to better support ELs? What needs were they intended to address?

16. During the summer 2020 and the 2020-2021 academic year, what training or professional learning opportunities did you offer in the district to support teachers in promoting ELs' academic learning and/or language development? How has your district's approach to professional learning during the pandemic differed from your approach in previous years?

Probe if not mentioned:

- What topics or content did the training focus on?
- Was the content specific to or adapted for the COVID-19 context? If so, in what ways?
- Who delivered the training?
- Who participated in the training?

17. Has your district offered educators a list of resources or tools specifically for working with ELs in a digital environment? If so, how did you decide what to include in the list?

18. What have been your greatest challenges this academic year with regard to staff capacity to serve ELs within the context of the pandemic?

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL SUPPORTS FOR ELS

Next, I'd like to ask you about how your district is addressing ELs' social-emotional health.

19. How did your district identify and monitor students' social and emotional health during the pandemic?

- a. Are there any modifications to these measures for ELs?**
- b. Are there any measures only for ELs?**

20. What strategies or practices has your district used to support EL students' and their families' social and emotional health during the pandemic?

Listen for (each strategy or practice could incorporate one or more of what is listed below):

- € Counselors/social workers/support staff trained to work with ELs
- € Counselors/social workers/support staff trained in supporting social and emotional health of all students
- € Strategies to build relationships between students and teachers
- € Strategies to build relationships among students
- € Strategies to help students regulate their emotions
- € Strategies to prevent bullying
- € Strategies to promote the use of trauma-informed instructional practices
- € Other _____

Probe if not mentioned:

- Are any of these different than the strategies for all students? If so, how?
- Were any of these supports available in languages other than English?

21. What are the roles and activities of district and school staff that focus on the social and emotional health of all students, and more specifically, the social and emotional health of ELs?

Listen for:

- € Role of EL specialists (e.g., Title III coordinators)
- € Role of social emotional learning coordinator (or other similar types of coordinators)
- € Role of other district staff including psychologists, counselors, and social workers
- € Role of school administrators
- € Role of family or community liaisons
- € Role of other types of staff

22. What training or supports have staff in your district received to support ELs' social and emotional health?

Listen for:

- € Supports on identifying social-emotional needs or trauma
- € Supports on specific programs that are designed to promote social and emotional health (e.g., training on Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports)
- € Training on promoting positive school climate or school connectedness (for remote learning or in-person learning)
- € Training on trauma-informed practices
- € Other _____

23. What have been the greatest challenges your district has faced to supporting EL students' social and emotional health?

Listen for:

- € District capacity issues (e.g., resources, staffing levels, expertise)
- € Educator/school leader capacity issues
- € Limited information on EL's social emotional needs and strategies
- € Providing supports that are accessible to ELs and culturally responsive
- € Magnitude of stressors that ELs are facing
- € Other _____

EL PARENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

I'd like to ask about your district's approach to engaging and communicating with parents and families of ELs.

24. First, as your district developed and revised its plans for providing services during the pandemic, what types of opportunities did parents of ELs have to provide input or otherwise participate in the decision-making process?

Probe if not mentioned:

- What steps did your district take to ensure these opportunities were accessible to parents of ELs (e.g., outreach strategies, translation services)?
- What challenges did you face in engaging or collecting input from EL parents?

25. What, if any, steps has your district taken to better understand the needs of EL parents and families during the pandemic?

Listen for:

- € Surveys translated into home language
- € Information gathering by EL parent liaisons
- € Virtual office hours (with home language speakers or translation tools)
- € Input from community-based organizations
- € Other _____

26. What strategies has the district used to communicate with EL parents and families during the pandemic? Have these strategies differed from your approach to communicating with EL parents and families before the pandemic?

Probe if not mentioned:

- In what format(s) has information been provided (e.g., texts, emails, phone calls, social media, home visits)?
- How has the information been made accessible to parents who speak languages other than English?
- Is this new or different during the pandemic with regard to content, frequency, modes?
-

27. What types of information has your district's communication with EL parents and families focused on?

Listen for:

- € Information about COVID-19 risks and health practices
- € Information about educational services provided by district (e.g., reopening plans, options for instruction)
- € Information on promoting students' social-emotional health
- € Information on supporting students' English and/or home language development
- € Information on supporting students' academic learning
- € Other _____

28. [if online remote learning is used] What, if any, supports has the district provided to EL parents and families to help them guide students in engaging with online and digital learning resources?

Listen for:

- € Distribution of technological devices
- € Technical manuals translated into multiple languages
- € Tech support that is accessible to non-English speaking parents (e.g., call-in center with home language speakers/interpreters)
- € Adult education programming to enhance EL parents' digital literacy
- € Online educational resources
- € Strategies to help parents address barriers to student attendance/engagement
- € Other _____

Probe if not mentioned:

- How were these supports disseminated?
- Do you have a sense of the extent to which EL parents/families have used these supports?

29. What, if any, types of wraparound or non-academic supports has the district provided to EL parents and families?

Listen for:

- € Distribution of food and/or supplies
- € Connecting families with medical care or support
- € Connecting families with mental health care or support
- € Referrals for social, financial, or legal support services
- € Other _____

30. What, if any, guidance or supports has the district provided to schools or teachers to help them better communicate and engage with EL parents and families during the pandemic? Has this differed from what the district provided before the pandemic? If so, how?

Listen for:

- € Written guidance or expectations around EL parent outreach
- € Professional development
- € Online resources
- € Translation services
- € Other _____

31. What, if any, challenges has your district faced in communicating with or supporting EL parents and families during the pandemic?

Listen for:

- € Providing communication in diverse languages
- € Communicating with particular language groups
- € Communicating in culturally responsive ways
- € Difficulty reaching parents of ELs (e.g., maintaining contact information)
- € Finding effective modes of communication
- € Other _____

32. Has your district taken any steps to build its capacity to engage with or support EL parents and families during the pandemic?

Listen for:

- € Collaborating with existing community partners/CBOs
- € Forming new community partnerships
- € Hiring new district or school-level staff such as family/community liaisons
- € Adopting new software or technology (e.g., translation software)
- € Other _____

CONCLUSION

33. What have been the greatest challenges your district has faced in supporting ELs during the pandemic?

Listen for:

- € Structural barriers to remote learning (e.g., technology limitations)
- € Teacher capacity to provide effective remote learning for ELs

- € Knowledge of effective ways to serve ELs in remote learning environment
- € Barriers to engaging with EL parents and families
- € Other_____

34. What practices have you found to be most useful in supporting ELs during the pandemic?

35. Those were all of the questions I had for you today. Is there anything we haven't discussed about your district's approach to serving ELs during the pandemic that would be important for us to know?

Thank you very much for speaking with me!