

Students with Limited English Proficiency

What does NCLB say?

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) recognizes that students who are not native English speakers (Limited English Proficient “LEP”) need additional academic support. NCLB says that these students must be taught the same academic content their classmates are learning, at the same time as they are learning English. The type of language instruction program is determined by the school, but regardless of the type of program, the program must have as a goal developing students’ English proficiency while also helping them to master academic standards. The programs may use both English and a child’s native language.

The expectation in the law is that LEP students should be able to participate in traditional classes after three years in a language instruction program. Once your child has been transitioned out of a language instruction program, the district has a responsibility to monitor your child’s English-language development for two more years to ensure that they are able to fully participate in the regular academic program.

No Child Left Behind also gives important rights to the parents of LEP students. If your child has been identified as LEP you have a right to know the level of your child’s English proficiency and what programs your child will be enrolled in to learn English, as well as how those programs will meet your child’s needs. This notice should be

provided no later than 30 days after the beginning of the school year and be in a language you can understand. The notice should include:

- Your child’s level in English (such as Novice, Intermediate, or Advanced), the defining characteristics of each language proficiency level, and how their level was determined.
- The teaching methods of the program your child is being assigned to.
- How the program will help your child learn English and at the same time meet academic standards.
- The requirements for exiting the special English-language acquisition program and an estimate of how long that should take.
- If a student is in secondary school, the school should tell you the expected graduation rate for students in the program they are recommending. If your child is not expected to graduate, you should request additional support or a different program that will prepare your child to graduate.

Parents also have a right to decline enrollment in the program selected by the school, to remove a child from the program, or to choose a different language instruction program if available. Note that if you decide not to enroll your child in the program recommended by the school, the district is still obligated to work to overcome language barriers faced by your child.

Why is this important?

The basic idea of NCLB is that students should receive the type of instruction necessary to help them meet academic achievement goals, so that all students are ready to continue learning in college or the workforce by the time they finish high school. Students who are not native English speakers need additional academic support in order to transition from their primary language to English. It is extremely important that LEP students are not only given the help they need to learn English as quickly as possible but also have access to the regular curriculum.

What can I do?

Request all school reports in your native language.

Get to know other parents whose children have been through the same school or the same programs. They should be able to help you to understand how the different program options work at your school and how you can best support your child’s education.

Talk to your child’s teacher often about your expectations and ask questions so that you have a clear understanding of what program your child is in, what language your child is learning in, and how your child is being taught English. Take time to visit your child’s classroom during the school day to see what they are learning.

If you cannot communicate with your child’s teacher, find someone on the school staff who can serve as a translator or who can answer your questions.