



Quick Reference Guide: District Level Effective Family Engagement

Ensuring Access to Interpretation and Translation Services

District leaders follow a clear process for identifying parents and guardians who need interpretation and translation services and ensure communication is provided accordingly (e.g., essential educational documents are translated, interpreters are available at key meetings).



Effective family engagement requires English Learner (EL) families feel welcome at schools and districts, and that they remain informed of their students' programming options, progress, and other relevant information. This communication should be provided in a language understood and/or chosen by EL families, which may be their home language. To ensure successful communication, district leaders establish and follow clear processes for identifying interpretation and translation service needs during initial enrollment. They gather data to ensure families feel welcomed and encouraged to partner with the district from the very beginning. They use data about language needs to ensure resources are allocated for translation and interpretation services. District leaders are also aware of and use available district-family communication resources such as [home language surveys](#), [parent notification and program placement notifications](#), and [guidance for EL Parent Advisory Councils in multiple languages](#). District leaders also establish interpreter and translation resource banks and multilingual options for other EL services such as counseling and evaluation services. They build staff and educator capacity to use interpreters and two-way communication in ways that promote family

engagement across the district.

Prioritizing English Learner Family Engagement in District Planning

The district improvement plan and other district plans communicate urgency around building relationships with families of ELs and reflect a commitment to partnering with families of ELs (e.g., the vision for ELs is specific about supports and opportunities for families, support for dual capacity buildings).

A district's [plan for success](#) identifies priorities for the superintendent and school community, and communicates urgency around initiatives critical to EL success such as family engagement. An intentional focus on EL family engagement in all district plans, including improvement and professional learning plans, prioritizes the development of partnerships with EL families. District leaders communicate the importance of EL family engagement by collaboratively developing a common vision for EL success with administrators, educators, and parents, connecting district planning to that vision, and supporting the implementation of chosen goals and strategies through resource allocation. Appropriate funding for EL family engagement activities is essential for ensuring goals and strategies outlined in plans are implemented in real life and showcasing the district's commitment to EL student success. In addition, district leaders align planning efforts throughout the system. They ensure school strategic and improvement plans include connections to EL family engagement goals and strategies at the district level. In this way they create the type of coherence that helps school personnel and families work together to build strong partnerships.

English Learner Parent Advisory Council (ELPAC) Opportunities for Parent Involvement

- Creating by-laws (rules) regarding officers and operational procedures to support ELs and their families
- Advising the school district, school committee, and board of trustees on EL matters
- Meeting regularly with school and/or district leaders to participate in English Language Education (ELE) program planning, development and improvement
- Advising the district or school on new and/or proposed ELE programs
- Developing and reviewing district and school improvement plans to ensure they support EL success
- Meeting at least annually with school committee and school councils to provide an EL perspective on relevant issues

Adapted from Massachusetts Guidance for English Learner Parent Advisory Councils, p. 3-4

Shared Decision-Making with English Learner Families

District leaders and school committees effectively engage families, encouraging their contributions to decision-making involving their children’s education and their participation in school/district activities (e.g., English Learner Parent Advisory Council, curriculum nights, parent-teacher conferences) by ensuring ongoing collaboration and providing them with resources in English and their preferred language.

Partnering with EL families will likely change the way districts and school committees have traditionally engaged with them and served ELs. In the past, districts have sought to improve EL parent engagement to impact EL achievement. Expectations in the [Language Opportunities for Our Kids \(LOOK Act of 2017\)](#) focuses EL family engagement beyond instructional outcomes and makes it part of sustained planning and governance in districts serving ELs. For example, the LOOK Act sets a specific number of ELs that triggers the establishment of a district-wide [English Learner Parent Advisory Council](#) (ELPAC).



Who is required to create and support ELPACs?

School districts or charter schools with 100 or more English learners or in which English learners comprise 5% of the student body, whichever is less, are required to establish ELPACs. Schools designated as underperforming or chronically underperforming must also establish ELPACs.

[ELPAC information for parents](#)

This ELPAC is intended as an opportunity for EL families to become more involved in schooling activities and contribute to decision-making at the school and district levels. District leaders who support effective engagement with EL families encourage parents’ engagement in ELPACs as well as other leadership venues such as parent-teacher conferences, parent-teacher associations, and other relevant groups. They also provide funding for translation and interpretation services at meetings and share minutes from meetings in EL families’ preferred languages to keep all families informed and included.

📋 Actions-at-a-Glance: Family Engagement

Family Engagement: What can educators at the district level do?

- Identify EL families’ preferred communication languages and ensure resources are allocated to provide translation and interpretation services for relevant home-school communications and meetings
- Allocate enough funding to ensure planned EL parent engagement family outreach activities are implemented effectively
- Hold regular ELPAC meetings with authentic opportunities to discuss student success, programming improvements, and shared decision-making
- Schedule annual meetings with the ELPAC and school committee to review EL performance data and discuss district plan changes and/or ELE program improvements, as appropriate
- Use Massachusetts Blueprint for EL Success to support planning and implementation of chosen strategies at every level of the system (district, schools, classrooms)
- Establish mechanisms for schools, EL families and organizations, and community partners to jointly set goals and strategies in district and school strategic and improvement (task forces, committees, councils, working groups, advisory boards, etc.)
- Align initiatives for EL family engagement across the district, connecting district, school, and classroom efforts
- Establish metrics and processes for measuring outcomes of EL family engagement efforts, evaluate progress towards planned goals, and adjust goals and/or plans based on relevant data when appropriate

Planning Resources

DESE Practical Tools and Resources

[Planning for Success in Massachusetts](#) outlines a hands-on strategic and improvement planning process designed to build district and school capacity and coherence and provide opportunities for parent and community involvement, along with related tools and resources.

[Family and Community Engagement: Resources for Families](#) provides resources for family and community engagement to develop and maintain partnerships that support the healthy development, learning, and growth of students.

DESE Guidance

[ELPAC Information for Parents](#) provides a 1-page summary of English Learner Parent Advisory Councils (ELPACs) for parents in several languages.

[Identification, Assessment, Placement, & Reclassification of ELs](#) provides guidance for developing a system for identifying, assessing, and placing ELs in ways that meet federal and state expectations, guidelines, and legislation.

[LOOK Act](#) provides an overview of the Language Opportunities for our Kids (LOOK) law governing expectations for supporting ELs, including key provisions such as Language Acquisition Programming Flexibility and Oversight and Increased Input from Parents and Guardians.

[Guidance for Implementing the Massachusetts State Seal of Biliteracy](#) provides information about how to develop and implement bilingual programs based on the Language Opportunity for Our Kids (LOOK) Act.

[Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education \(SLIFE\)](#) provides information about the importance of asset-based approaches when teaching SLIFE (see Definition on p. 2 and Guiding Principles on p. 7).

[Guidance for English Learner Parent Advisory Councils \(ELPAC\)](#) describes district requirements for establishing ELPACs, including resources in multiple languages to support communication of expectations to EL families and encourage their participation.

[Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation: Classroom Teacher Rubric](#) provides guidance regarding expectations for all educators. Standard 3 clarifies expectations about family and community engagement and can be used to help guide communication with families and educator improvement efforts (see p. 10 - 11).

Federal Resources

[English Learner Tool Kit Chapter 10: Tools and resources for ensuring meaningful communication with Limited English Proficient parents](#) provides suggestions for bridging families' cultures with school, information around translation, and resources (see p. 7-13).

[Family](#) and [Community Engagement](#) provides resources for developing relationships with families.

[Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships](#) presents outcomes of effective home-school partnerships and provides examples of successful ones. This guide can be used to help structure family engagement and partnerships (see a summary of the Framework on p.11 and Case Studies on p. 13-23).

Other Featured Resources

[Policy Brief Parent, Family, Community Involvement in Education](#) presents ideas for engaging parents and communities for supporting student success.

[Building Capacity for Family Engagement](#) presents Dr. Karen Mapp describing the origins and goals of the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships adopted by the U.S. Department of Education and provides related resources.

[Funds of Knowledge and Home Visit Toolkit](#) provides guidance and resources for developing asset-based strategies for engaging EL families and partnering with them to support EL success.