**Overview**

Students designated as Long-term English Learners (LTELs) are commonly described as students who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for 5-7 years or more[[1]](#footnote-1) who are not progressing towards English proficiency[[2]](#footnote-2). In many cases these students remain designated as English learners for long periods of time because of structural issues such as lack of access to high-quality instruction promoting their content area, literacy, and language development. Although there is wide variation among this group of students, research suggests LTELs possess a common set of strengths and face somewhat similar challenges that educators can keep in mind when working to promote their success.

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| **Potential Strengths and Common Challenges of Students Designated as LTELs** |
| **Strengths** | **Challenges** |
| * Can be self-motivated and able to self-advocate
* Can be confident, active learners who perceive themselves as successful learners despite challenges of school and poor academic performance
* Use resources across two languages to communicate and make sense of the world (codeswitching, translanguaging, etc.)
* Can demonstrate strong academic performance in some academic areas despite not having attained English language proficiency
* Possess strong oral proficiency but may struggle with academic language
 | * Need support for leveraging the sophisticated language skills they use in social contexts to academic and instructional contexts
* May feel out of place or embarrassed in typical ESL classrooms
* May feel and/or act disengaged due to perceived lack of ability for succeeding in school
* Face systemic barriers to achieving language proficiency (weak or incoherent language development programs, simplified instruction that does not provide explicit academic language instruction, deficit-based educator perceptions, overgeneralized English learner reclassification criteria, etc.)
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**Strategies and Best Practices**

Students designated as LTELs are emergent bilinguals who possess often unidentified and untapped literacy and linguistic abilities they can leverage for success. To support their success, all educators can **engage LTELs and their families in investigating factors beyond English language proficiency that influence students’ educational experiences** to better understand why students remain identified as LTELs, how to leverage their strengths, and co-develop goals that support their success. Additionally, **school leaders** across contexts (low, middle, or high incidence districts) can:

* **Ensure overarching conditions needed to support the success of all English learners, including LTELs, are in place**. The [Blueprint for English Learner Success](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/) presents these essential conditions and actions educators can take to achieve them.
* **Develop an internal definition and process for identifying and supporting students who need additional support** before they reach the 5-year mark[[3]](#footnote-3) using information gathered about the specific students served and supports developing instructional and programmatic next steps. Engage ELs in identifying issues and developing this definition.
* **Provide classroom teachers with regular and ongoing professional learning** focused on addressing deficit-thinking and learning how to use strategies that promote rigorous standards-based language instruction for students designated as LTELs.
* **Provide time for collaboration between ESL and other teachers of LTELs so they can support explicit language and literacy development throughout the day.** Students designated as LTELs make great progress when all their teachers “[develop language and literacy objectives that support their content objectives](https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/translanguaging-resources/resources-for-work-with-particular-subgroups/supporting-emergent-bilingual-learners-labeled-long-term-english-language-learners-ltell/)”. Beyond regular and sustained time for collaboration, this requires ensuring the ESL curriculum focuses on the type of academic language LTELs will need to be successful in content areas.
* **Establish a** [**team**](https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/translanguaging-resources/resources-for-work-with-particular-subgroups/supporting-emergent-bilingual-learners-labeled-long-term-english-language-learners-ltell/) **and processes (regular meetings, data analysis protocols, etc.) to review LTELs’ progress and trigger interventions, supports, and/or programmatic and placement changes.** Include ESL and content teachers in the team and incorporate LTELs’ and their families’ input when reviewing progress and setting goals. Ensure team reviews evidence of student learning (work samples, performance data). Maintain a flexible schedule so students can move to new courses as they progress in their language development.

**Suggestions for Low, Middle and High-Incidence Districts**

**Educators across all districts (low, middle, and high incidence) can:**

* Implement [strategies for supporting students designated as LTELs](https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/CUNY-NYSIEB-Framework-for-LTELs-Spring-2013-FINAL.pdf) in ESL instruction, such as intellectually challenging and engaging tasks, [culturally relevant, responsive](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/culturally-responsive/) and [sustaining](https://web.stanford.edu/class/linguist159/restricted/readings/Paris2012.pdf) pedagogy, activities to promote oracy and literacy development, ample structured opportunities for [quality student interactions](http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/bilingual-ed/quality_student_interactions-2.pdf) and cooperative learning, and formative assessment.
* Support students at *all* English proficiency levels (including those at higher proficiency levels) by providing text-rich environments, opportunities to explore and deconstruct mentor/model texts, and explicit connections being made between their first language and English (practices supporting the Features of High-Quality ESL Instruction).

**Sample Essential Components of Courses for LTELs**

* Focus on advanced academic language, oracy, and literacy development
* Academic rigor
* Student engagement
* Consistent routines and goal setting
* Culturally responsive, relevant, and sustaining pedagogy (social justice orientation, asset-based, affirming, supporting critical consciousness, etc.)
* Community and relationships
* Explicit instruction of study skills and habits

*Adapted from* [*Olsen, 2012*](https://rcoe.learning.powerschool.com/mmccabe/b.e.l.i.e.f/cms_file/show/73806557.pdf?t=1518759647)

**Educators serving LTELs in low and mid-incidence districts can** promote literacy and oracy in students’ first language and English and usestudents’ first language skills to support English language proficiency development.

**Educators serving LTELs in high-incidence districts can:**

* Promote literacy and oracy in students’ first language and English by providing dual language programs with opportunities sequenced all the way through Advanced Placement and college preparatory courses at the secondary levels.
* Develop specialized courses focused on the needs of students designated as LTELs.

**Special Considerations: Supporting LTELs’ Social and Emotional Learning**

Students designated as LTELs may not feel like they belong and are part of the school community because they do not fit traditional categories of English learners (such as recently arrived immigrants) and because their language skills may be overlooked or devalued. Educators can attend to their social and emotional learning by:

* **Developing community and a learning environment built on trust** that supports [risk-taking](https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/153447063.pdf) for learning. Consider developing student peer mentoring programs to build classroom community and belonging.
* **Connecting new language learning to students’ strengths** (bi/multilingualism, confidence, skills in specific content areas, etc.) and highlighting the relevance of topics studied in relationship to students’ experiences and aspirations.
* **Affirming the value students’ cultures and languages** for learning and succeeding beyond school.[[4]](#footnote-4)
* **Collaboratively developing learning goals with students,** including discussing where LTELs are in developing their English language proficiency and what motivates them to continue learning.[[5]](#footnote-5)
* **Explicitly teaching and modeling how to use** [**social and emotional competencies**](https://casel.org/sel-framework/)(self-awareness of cultural and linguistic assets, self-management to become independent learners, etc.) to promote agency (setting goals, selecting actions and strategies, monitoring progress) and healthy identity development.

**Actions-at-a-Glance**

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| **Actions for Classroom Educators** |
| * Develop learning profiles for LTELs to get behind the label, build on their strengths, develop appropriate language learning goals, and provide “just right” scaffolds and supports.
* Apply [translanguaging](https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/translanguaging-resources/) strategies to leverage the full range of LTELs linguistic repertoires.
* Use [WIDA ELD Standards 2020 Edition](https://wida.wisc.edu/teach/standards/eld/2020) resources and [Can Do Descriptors](https://wida.wisc.edu/teach/can-do/descriptors) to discuss student progress towards attaining English language proficiency, co-developing language learning goals, and promoting language self-assessment/monitoring.
* Collaborate with other ESL, content area, special education, and specialist educators of LTELs to plan instruction, review student work and performance, monitor student progress, refer to appropriate services, and make placement decisions.
* Review current instructional materials, tasks and activities in ESL courses that incorporate LTELs to ensure they are rigorous and focused on academic language and literacy development in connection to content area topics, themes, and analytical practices.
* Review current practices using the [Blueprint for English Learner Success Self-Assessment Tools](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/plan/default.html) to identify areas that could be improved to better support LTELs.
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| **Actions for School and District Leaders** |
| * Offer specialized ESL courses focused on the advanced academic language, oracy, and literacy needs of LTELs.
* Provide time for ESL, content area, special education, and specialist educators of LTELs to plan instruction, review student work and performance, monitor student progress, refer to appropriate services, and make placement decisions.
* Provide resources to support adoption and/or development of instructional materials to support rigorous instruction for LTELs.
* Identify and change structural and systemic issues that interfere with LTELs’ meaningful access to challenging language and content area instruction (inadequate reclassification criteria, lack of support services for reclassified English learners, scheduling requirements or lack of qualified staff that prevent participation in advanced coursework, etc.).
* Review current practices using the [Blueprint for English Learner Success Self-Assessment Tools](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/plan/default.html) to identify areas that could be improved to better support LTELs.
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**Instructional Planning Resources**

## **DESE Practical Tools and Resources**

ESL Tools and Resources provides guidance for support effective ESL instruction including the Unit and Lesson Planning Thinking Processes and Templates.

**DESE Guidance**

Culturally Relevant Framework and Critical Consciousness Framework provide guidance for culturally relevant teaching and leading, including specific look fors related to supporting learners in the development of academic proficiency and academic identity in service of academic achievement as well as related student and teacher outcomes, actions, and dispositions.

[Culturally Responsive Teaching & Leading](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/culturally-responsive/) provides resources that define cultural responsiveness and address its importance in our schools and classrooms, including professional development tools supporting culturally responsive teaching (such as the [Culturally Responsive Teaching Rubric](https://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/calibration/crt-rubric.docx)), sample [look fors](https://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/calibration/look-fors.docx), and a library of [classroom videos](https://www.doe.mass.edu/edeffectiveness/prof-learning/crt-videos/) showcasing culturally responsive instruction.

ESL Best Practices Quick Reference Guides provides guidance on a variety of key topics (formative assessment, racial equity and social justice, early literacy, etc.) as well as English learner student groups (students designated as long-term English learners, English learners with disabilities, etc.).

[Massachusetts Blueprint for English Learner Success](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/blueprint.docx) and related [Blueprint for English Learner Success Quick Reference Guides](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/dashboard.html) present essential conditions and actions educators can take to provide equitable experiences and outcomes for English learners.

Next Generation ESL Curriculum Resource Guide provides support for collaborative ESL curriculum development, including collaborative tools, processes, protocols, and resources used in the development of ESL MCUs.

**Federal Resources**

[Long-Term English Learners: Blending Academic Language and Content](https://ncela.ed.gov/files/uploads/2015/Deborah_Short_LongTermELsBlendingAcademicLanguageandContent.pdf) presents strategies and interventions for supporting students designated as LTELs.

**Other Featured Resources**

[Changing Course for Long Term English Learners](https://californianstogether.app.box.com/s/t8krny14cwpu70i59qy9p0mliz9mo8oe) highlights recommendations for developing programs and classrooms for students designated as LTELs.

[Effective Interventions for Long-Term English Learners](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/ESSA-Evidence-Guides/Effective_Interventions_for_Long-Term_English_Learners) explores strategies and interventions that school districts can implement to support LTELs (see suggestions for specialized courses and instructional in p. 23 and

[Exercise 7: Guidance for Planning a Long-Term ELL Strategic, Academic and Literacy Support Model that Builds College and Career Readiness](http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/bilingual-ed/exercise-7.pdf) highlights essential features and components of effective programs for students designated as LTELs.

[Framework for the Education of Long-Term English Learners: Grades 6-12](https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/CUNY-NYSIEB-Framework-for-LTELs-Spring-2013-FINAL.pdf) provides program, curriculum, instruction, assessment recommendations for supporting students designated as LTELs.

[Long Term English Learner Course Handbook](https://docs.google.com/document/d/16rdjxeD0dcuZ0wY3dq7Ph-6_H4L7JofnMfj5nkfeRwU/edit) provides guidance on the components of an effective LTEL program, LTEL course design, resources and more.

[Long-term English Learners (LTELs): Predictors, Patterns, and Outcomes; Brief 1: Defining LTEL](https://herc.rice.edu/research/long-term-english-learners-ltels-predictors-patterns-outcomes-brief-1-defining-ltel) provides guidance for developing a definition that helps identify students who are LTELs.

[LTEL Course Descriptions](https://sites.google.com/site/lausdmmedltel/ltel-course-descriptions) provides information about sample course designed for LTELs and organized around thematic units.

[Meeting the Literacy Development Needs of Adolescent English Language Learners Through Content Area Learning Part One: Focus on Motivation and Engagement](https://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/sites/brown.edu.academics.education-alliance/files/publications/adell_litdv1.pdf) provides guidance for understanding and implementing practices to promote adolescent English learners’ motivation and engagement to support literacy.

[Meeting the Literacy Development Needs of Adolescent English Language Learners Through Content Area Learning Part Two: Focus on Developing Academic Literacy Habits and Skills Across the Content Areas](https://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/sites/brown.edu.academics.education-alliance/files/publications/adell_litdv2.pdf) outlines eight evidence-based instructional practices to support the academic literacy habits and skills of adolescent students (see Adolescent Literacy Best Practices p. 10, and Sections III and IV highlighting research-based practices to support literacy development).

[Meeting the Unique Needs of Long-Term English Learners: A Guide for Educators](https://rcoe.learning.powerschool.com/mmccabe/b.e.l.i.e.f/cms_file/show/73806468.pdf?t=1518758570) highlights characteristics and best practices for supporting students designated as LTELs.

[Promoting academic literacy among secondary English language learners: a synthesis of research and practice](https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5m14j4vp)

[Quality Student Interactions: Why Are They Crucial to Language Learning and How Can We Support Them?](http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/bilingual-ed/quality_student_interactions-2.pdf) provides a rationale for the essential role of social interactions for students, describes quality student interactions and ways to make them happen, and provides a classroom vignette illustrating them.

[Secondary School Courses Designed to Address the Language Needs and Academic Gaps of Long-Term English Language Learners](https://rcoe.learning.powerschool.com/mmccabe/b.e.l.i.e.f/cms_file/show/73806557.pdf?t=1518759647) provides essential components for designing English language development courses focused on supporting students designated as LTELs as well as examples from districts implementing promising practices.

[Supporting Emergent Bilingual Learners Labeled Long-Term English Language Learners (LTELL)](https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/translanguaging-resources/resources-for-work-with-particular-subgroups/supporting-emergent-bilingual-learners-labeled-long-term-english-language-learners-ltell/) presents best practices for emergent bilinguals, including those designated as long-term ELs drawing on core principles from the of the [CUNY-NYSIEB initiative](https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/our-team/) that view bilingualism as a resource in education and support a multilingual whole-school approach.

[Supporting Long-Term English Learners: A Guide](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/reports/LTEL_Guide.pdf) highlights promising practices and next steps for supporting students designated as LTELs.

[Supporting Multilingual Learners/Long-term English Language Learners](http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/bilingual-ed/topic-brief-long-term-ells-a.pdf) presents school based (p. 5) and classroom based (p. 7) strategies for supporting students designated as LTELs, along with examples of the strategies and profiles of students designated as LTELs to assist with better identification and an annotated bibliography of resources (p.18-29).

[Long-term English learner students: Spotlight on an overlooked population](https://www.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/LTEL-factsheet.pdf) provides a definition, factors that impede student progress and promising practices to support students designated as LTELs (p.3).

[The Best Resources for Supporting Long-Term English Language Learners](https://larryferlazzo.edublogs.org/2016/12/03/the-best-resources-on-supporting-long-term-english-language-learners/) provides a useful list of resources for educators.

[The Proficiency, Instructional and Affective Domains of Long-Term English Language Learners: A Review of the Research](https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1215543.pdf) presents key points about the characteristics and needs of students designated as LTELs.

**[For additional resources you may wish to consult, click here.](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/esl-toolkit/tools-resources/)**

1. This definition fits with Massachusetts’ [Guidelines for the Use of Benchmarks Toward Attaining English Proficiency](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/resources/benchmarks/), in which “making progress” means that an EL is on track to attain English proficiency within six years of entering a Massachusetts school. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cashiola, L. & Potter, D. (2020). [Long-term English Learners (LTELs): Predictors, Patterns, & Outcomes Brief 1: Defining LTEL](https://herc.rice.edu/research/long-term-english-learners-ltels-predictors-patterns-outcomes-brief-1-defining-ltel). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cashiola, L. & Potter, D. (2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Paris, D. & Alim, S. Eds. (2017). Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World. New York: Teachers College Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Whitlock, J. (2010). [Participatory Leadership for English Learner Success](https://californianstogether.app.box.com/s/64bzjmqidhmwsch281qkm8psjq47omou). Association of California School Administrators *Leadership Magazine*. Nov/Dec. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)