dese
MASSACHUSETTS
Department of Elementary
and Secondary Education

Students With Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE)

Guidance for SLIFE Identification, Services, and Support

June 2024

Contents

Exhibits

Introduction

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (The Department) is issuing this guidance to assist school districts with serving an increasing number of **students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE)**. While schools and districts in Massachusetts have served SLIFE for many years, the state has seen an increase in the number of newly arrived students, some of whom have significant gaps informal schooling, since the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of these students may be refugee children fleeing civil unrest or war, while others may have had inconsistent access to formal education in their home countries before coming to the United States. While SLIFE are diverse, with interruptions in schooling often due to factors like conflict, migration, economic hardship, or limited access to education in their home countries, this guidance aims to help districts identify additional supports these students may need beyond standard English learner services. The Department is committed to supporting school districts and educators to improve educational opportunities for all students, including students identified as SLIFE.

Educational Vision

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

The Department will continue to work with districts, schools, and educators to promote teaching and learning that is antiracist, inclusive, multilingual, and multicultural; that values and affirms each and every student and their families; and that creates equitable opportunities and experiences for all students, particularly those who have been historically underserved.

Our goal is that as a result of their public education in Massachusetts, all students will:

- Attain academic knowledge and skills.
- Understand and value self.
- Understand and value others.
- Engage with the world.

So that they can:

- Be curious and creative.
- Shape their path.
- Feel connected.
- Be empowered.

Learn more about the Department's Educational Vision and related resources.

About This Document

In 2011, a Massachusetts Working Group was established to address the unique needs of students identified as SLIFE. In 2012, the working group drafted a definition of "SLIFE", which helped educators more effectively identify and support students. Subsequently, the Department's first iteration of guidance for working with SLIFE was published in 2015 and then revised in 2019.

In collaboration with practitioners, the Department continues its history of supporting the unique subset of English learners (ELs) identified as SLIFE. In 2022, the Department's Office of Language Acquisition (OLA), in partnership with the Region 1 Comprehensive Center (R1CC), initiated the latest phase of SLIFE work, responding to requests from school districts and educators for more support in operationalizing the SLIFE definition and guidance. This current phase, driven by data showing increasing numbers of newcomers arriving in Massachusetts school districts, involves a three-pronged approach: research, a community of practice, and guidance and tool development.

Research	Community of Practice	Guidance and Tools
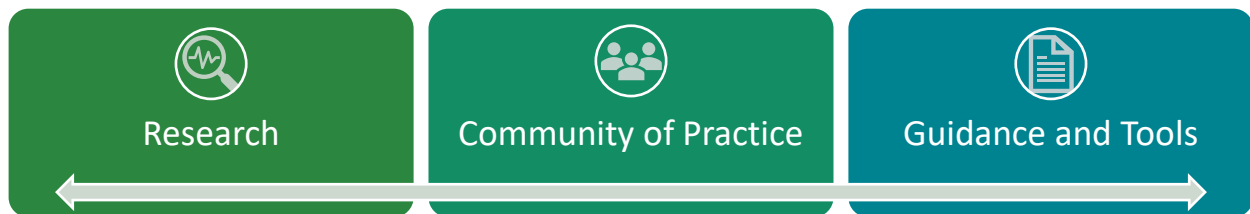
- Under research, check out Understanding and Supporting Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) in Massachusetts: A Review of Literature (CAL, 2022), or read a summary.
- Under the Massachusetts SLIFE Community of Practice (CoP), see artifacts from site visits and professional learning modules.
- Under guidance and tools, in addition to this guidance, check out the Massachusetts SLIFE Toolkit.

In this guidance document, the Department offers a **4-Step Process for SLIFE Identification, Services, and Support** to provide districts with recommendations on intake, screening, and—once a student is identified as SLIFE—the use of an individualized placement, service, and monitoring plan. The suggestions contained herein can be used to inform local decision-making about the most promising ways to support the well-being and success of students identified as SLIFE across the Commonwealth.

This guidance document aims to assist districts and schools in supporting SLIFE. It provides recommendations and examples that districts and schools may find valuable when developing or updating their local policies and practices. We encourage districts and schools to seek and consider input from key stakeholders, such as English Learner Parent Advisory Councils, regarding SLIFE-related policies and practices. These stakeholders can offer crucial insights to enhance support strategies.

When reviewing this document and planning programming for SLIFE, it is essential to remember:

- SLIFE are entitled to equal educational opportunities. Districts and schools must take appropriate action[s] to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs.[1]
- SLIFE are entitled to English learner services in accordance with state and federal law and regulations.[2]

This guidance is intended to complement, not replace, existing legal obligations and best practices in supporting SLIFE. It is important to note that this document:

- Does not impose any new requirements on schools or districts.
- Does not abrogate, amend, or diminish any existing requirements to which schools and districts are subject. For example, some SLIFE may be children with disabilities entitled to special education services under state and federal special education laws. Schools and districts must provide such services in accordance with all applicable requirements.

---

[1] See e.g., Equal Educational Opportunities Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1703(f); G.L. c. 71A.

[2] See e.g., G.L. c. 71A; 603 CMR 14.

A. Students With Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE)

Exhibit 1. Definition of SLIFE in Massachusetts

To be identified as SLIFE in Massachusetts, a student must meet all the following criteria:

☐ The DOE025 SIMS field indicates the student is an English learner.

☐ The student is 8 to 21 years old.

☐ The student enrolled in a school in the United States after grade 2 <u>or</u> exited the U.S. for 6 months or more and did not attend school during this time.

☐ Prior exposure to formal schooling is characterized by **one of the following:**
    ☐ No formal schooling
    ☐ Significant interruptions in formal schooling
    ☐ Consistent but limited formal schooling *(e.g., school days were significantly shorter)*

In addition, the chart below outlines common characteristics often shared by students who have experienced significant interruptions in formal schooling. **Ultimately, districts should use a holistic approach to determine whether students' gaps in education indicate that they will need significant support beyond what is provided in existing English learner education (ELE) programs to access grade-appropriate content and build foundational skills.**

When a student is identified as SLIFE, the district should indicate this designation in the student's school profile, cumulative folder, and on SIMS Field DOE041 to help facilitate provision of appropriate supports and services.

Frequently, students identified as SLIFE share some of the following experiences, strengths and needs:[3]

Exhibit 2. Common Experiences, Strengths, and Needs of Students Who Have Experienced Significant Interruptions in Formal Schooling

May have emerging literacy skills (in home language and/or English).	May need intensive support to strengthen foundational skills in literacy, numeracy, or other content areas (in home language and/or English).	May function *approximately* 2 or more years below Massachusetts grade-level expectations in home language literacy and numeracy.
May have strengths in pragmatic life skills but less experience with decontextualized academic tasks.	May be used to oral communication over written communication.	May experience cultural dissonance when learning in a formal schooling environment.

---

[3] The definition of SLIFE in Massachusetts was developed using definitions by DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2009; Mississippi Department of Education 2022; Rhode Island Department of Education, 2020; U.S. Dept. of Education Newcomer Toolkit (2016); and WIDA (2015) and with input from MA SLIFE Community of Practice members

Identifying students as SLIFE is not about labeling for its own sake, but a strategic approach to ensure these learners receive crucial additional support. This designation acknowledges that these students have experienced circumstances beyond their control that prevented consistent access to formal education. It's important to emphasize that being identified as SLIFE does not reflect negatively on the learner's abilities or potential. The primary purpose of identifying a student as SLIFE is to:

- Recognize the unique educational strengths and needs of these students
- Ensure they receive targeted, additional supports beyond standard services
- Help educators develop and implement appropriate supports and interventions

By identifying SLIFE, schools can better tailor their instructional approaches and support systems to foster these students' academic success and integration into the educational environment.

The figure below outlines common factors that may contribute to interruptions in formal schooling, providing context for the diverse experiences of SLIFE.

Exhibit 3. Potential Factors That May Contribute to Interruptions in Formal Schooling

Factors contributing to interruptions in formal schooling can include, for example:

- Migration patterns
- Civil unrest or war
- Natural disasters
- Refugee experiences
- Isolated geographic locales
- Limited transportation
- Unavailable schools
- Lack of educational opportunities (e.g., due to gender restrictions)
- Economic circumstances
- Housing insecurity
- Chronic health issues

While these external factors are significant, students identified as SLIFE bring many valuable experiences as well as knowledge and skills. Examples of significant common SLIFE strengths related to individual, social, and cultural resources are listed in Exhibit 4.[4]

---

[4] Examples of individual, social, and cultural assets SLIFE commonly bring developed from Alvarez, 2020; Barba et al., 2019; CAL, 2022; DeCapua, 2016; DeCapua & Marshall, 2015; DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; Digby, 2019; Hos et al., 2019; Kennedy & Lamina, 2016; and district interviews conducted by AIR (forthcoming, Kray & Burns, 2024).

Exhibit 4. Examples of Individual, Social, and Cultural SLIFE Assets

Students identified as SLIFE …

Funds of knowledge/student expertise	… are experts on topics related to their lived experiences and backgrounds.
Home language	… bring a wealth of knowledge and varying levels of literacy in one or more languages—the home language, English, or additional languages. Some are already familiar with the cognitive process and mechanics of reading and writing. Thus, many skills are transferable to the work they will be doing in Massachusetts classrooms.
Cultural assets	… bring multiple and varied cultural lenses and understandings with which to interpret the world inside and beyond classroom walls.
Learning skills	… bring valuable ways of accessing knowledge and developing skills that are often undervalued in formal education settings.
Oral language skills	… bring oral language skills that have been developed prior to entering a Massachusetts school. Whether in English or another language, these skills serve as a foundation on which to build broader language-based skills, such as literacy, interpersonal skills, and playful and creative language use.
Resilience	… often have encountered more adversity in their lives than many of their peers will ever experience. As a result, they may bring multiple strategies for developing agency and making connections that reflect compassion, resilience and endurance.

By identifying SLIFE, schools can better allocate resources and tailor instructional approaches to address these students' specific strengths and needs related to interruptions in formal education, ultimately supporting their language development, academic success, and integration into the general educational system.

State Guidance

English learners, including those identified as SLIFE, receive instruction that promotes achievement of two overarching goals: English language development and academic content achievement.

Please visit the Massachusetts Guidance on English Learner Education Services and Programming to review the process for EL Identification, including:

1. Administering a Home Language Survey (HLS)
2. Academic records review (if available)
3. Assessing the student's English language proficiency through the WIDA screener
4. Determining EL or non-EL status

Take action:
Once the student is identified as an English learner, consider screening the student for potential SLIFE status.

Once a student who is age 8 or above is identified as an EL, the district can engage in the **4-Step Process for SLIFE Identification, Services, and Support** (introduced in the next section) to determine whether the student would benefit from services associated with a SLIFE classification. The 4-Step Process offers concrete actions and flexible resources to help districts make this determination—in ways appropriate to the local district and its students.

Key idea:
Local decision-making

Each district may determine its own process for SLIFE identification, placement, services, and programming.

Although the 4-Step Process is presented in a logical order, there is no requirement that each step of this process be done in this order. A site-based process for SLIFE identification, placement, programming, and support should be determined by each district and communicated with each school and responsible staff, as the district deems appropriate. Consider, for example, if this process might look different in a district that does student intake centrally rather than at each school, and whether the process might look different for students at the elementary, middle, or high school level.

Key idea:
Holistic approach

SLIFE classification and decisions about placement, programming, and services should not be made through one single test, but through holistic consideration of several contextual factors.

As the sample 4-Step Process demonstrates, SLIFE classification and subsequent decisions about services and support are not made through one single assessment, but through holistic consideration of several contextual factors and triangulation of data sources. Given especially challenging life circumstances, it is critical that educators seek to understand the unique experiential, linguistic, cultural, social-emotional, and academic strengths and needs of these students.

For this reason, once a student is identified as SLIFE, we recommend that districts consider the development of an individualized SLIFE Success Plan, as they deem appropriate. See Appendix A: SLIFE Success Portfolio for one example of how this can be done.

B. SLIFE Planning Team: District Self-Assessment

Variation Among Districts and Programming Options

Students identified as SLIFE are educated in a variety of settings. Schools across the Commonwealth vary in size, infrastructure, programming options, numbers of enrolled ELs, and other factors. The way that districts support SLIFE varies. For example, in some districts, SLIFE are placed in existing English Language Education programs (e.g., in Dual Language Education, Sheltered English Immersion, or Transitional Bilingual Education) where they receive additional support to accelerate learning.

Other districts design dedicated SLIFE programs that may include:

- High-intensity English and home language development
- Targeted foundational numeracy and literacy skills
- Extended time for instruction and support
- Additional connections with families and social services

It's crucial to emphasize that these tailored programs must supplement, not replace, SLIFE access to ESL and content area classes. The goal is to provide additional support to accelerate learning while ensuring SLIFE are fully integrated into the broader educational program and have equal opportunities to engage with grade-level content alongside their peers.

Given different district contexts and wide variability in the SLIFE population, decisions should be made at the local level for the best options and processes for delivering a supportive, equitable, and rigorous education to these students. However, it's crucial that districts balance providing necessary additional supports with minimizing segregation of SLIFE students.

For example, districts with high numbers of SLIFE may be able to create dedicated SLIFE programs, as the district deems appropriate, whereas this may be more difficult in districts with low SLIFE enrollment. Regardless of the approach:

- Educational programming for SLIFE must be implemented in the least segregative manner possible while still meeting educational goals.
- SLIFE, like all EL students, should not be retained in specialized programs longer than necessary to achieve program objectives.
- The aim is to provide targeted support while ensuring timely integration into general education.

These principles help balance the need for specialized instruction with the imperative to avoid unnecessary segregation and promote full inclusion in the broader school community. For more detailed guidance on balancing specialized support with integration, refer to pages 22–23 of the "Dear Colleague" letter (U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, 2015).

Whatever your district context and staff configuration, begin by considering how students identified as SLIFE are currently being served. Below you will find suggestions for convening a SLIFE Planning Team and completing a district self-assessment. The district will then be in a better position to determine what next steps to take to strengthen SLIFE support, services, and programming, and students' overall experience.

Tip: Considering creating a SLIFE program

Students identified as SLIFE benefit from programs that are tailored specifically for their strengths and needs, providing courses of study that are both accelerated and attainable (Cohan & Honigsfeld, 2017). When districts in Massachusetts wish to develop any new English Language Education program (ELE), including a dedicated SLIFE program, they must obtain approval from the state. Therefore, a district starting a new SLIFE program needs to complete the ELE program proposal process, while districts that educate SLIFE within existing ELE programs do not.

Convene a SLIFE Planning Team

On the importance of taking a team approach to making decisions about SLIFE services and programming: Shared responsibility, collaboration, coordination, and communication are critical to providing students identified as SLIFE with high-quality services. Regardless of the size, numbers of enrolled students, or range of programs offered by a district, a coordinated effort between the district and its schools is necessary to provide SLIFE with coherent learning experiences and an equitable, high-quality education. To create a strong foundation for reviewing and revising the district's approach to SLIFE identification, placement, services, and programming, consider creating a SLIFE Planning Team that can identify what is needed and enact changes in each site.

Form a SLIFE Planning Team

Several overlapping teams are responsible for planning and implementing programming for students identified as SLIFE—along with the follow-up support necessary for students that transition out of such programming. These plans are best executed when there is communication, coordination, buy-in, and shared responsibility among these teams.

Suggestions for Team Composition

Team composition may vary according to district size, staffing roles, and other characteristics. At the very least, the team should include staff with SLIFE expertise (or identify members to develop new SLIFE expertise) as well as administrators who can secure resources to implement changes to systems to meet needs of SLIFE (e.g., placement, services, support, programming).

Who Should Be Part of the SLIFE Team?

Team composition could include key leads and various stakeholders—for example, central and building administrators, coaches, content and language teachers at different grade levels, special educators, specialists serving SLIFE, guidance and adjustment counselors, nurses, family liaisons, registration staff, intake personnel, families, and students.

Review The Department's Guidance on SLIFE and Complete District Self-Assessment

1. The SLIFE Planning Team can begin by closely reading this guidance and analyzing the guidance in relation to the district's context. Complement with additional literature on SLIFE as needed—see, for example, [Understanding and Supporting Students With Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) in Massachusetts: A Review of Literature](#) (CAL, 2022).

2. The team can then complete a self-assessment of the district's overall SLIFE processes, services, and programming, including family/caregiver and student experiences.

Tools: For a self-assessment tool to assess district practices in relation to DESE guidance, refer to [sample resources](#) in the [MA SLIFE Toolkit](#). Keep in mind that Toolkit resources are examples rather than DESE-endorsed tools or required methods. The table below offers additional sample self-assessment prompts.

Exhibit 5. Sample Items for District/School SLIFE Services Self-Assessment

Sample Items for District/School SLIFE Services Self-Assessment
• **Initial identification procedures:** What is working well and what needs to be revised in identification procedures? Take a deep dive with the SLIFE Planning Team and stakeholders.
• **Coordinated programming**: How are various services and supports for students identified as SLIFE coordinated across the school or district (e.g., how is the school/district coordinating any special education, wraparound, or other services needed, in addition to English learner education programming?)? Do they have clear, coherent, and coordinated structures?
• **Collaboration and communication**: How are collaboration and communication systems working among stakeholders and locations (e.g., central office, registration building, parent center, schools, learning centers, classrooms)? How can superintendents, principals, directors, coordinators, and teachers set up and optimize communication and collaboration among departments?
• **Roles and responsibilities**: Who is responsible for what/where/when in SLIFE intake, placement, services, and monitoring processes? For engaging families/caregivers? How is this working?
• **Review services provided to students**: Are students receiving services to which they are entitled? Does the program meet various applicable compliance requirements?
Sample Follow-Up Steps
• After completing this SLIFE services self-assessment, we learned that our processes and services for students identified as SLIFE have the following strengths …
• And the following needs …
• We want to change the way we …
• We need to learn more about …
• We can make changes by …
• Our next steps are …

C. Four Steps for SLIFE Identification, Services, and Support

As the SLIFE Planning Team completes the district self-assessment, questions may arise about SLIFE identification, placement, and services. The 4-Step Process offers flexible, customizable, and step-by-step sample procedures and protocols for this purpose.

Snapshot: The 4-Step Process for SLIFE Identification, Services, and Support

This snapshot provides an overview of the 4-Step Process for SLIFE Identification, Services, and Support.

Key idea: Develop holistic understanding of students.

The first three steps of the 4-Step Process are meant to be used as a set of interconnected activities to not only determine whether students qualify for SLIFE status but also to develop holistic, asset-based understandings about student interests, goals, strengths, and needs. In flexible and customizable form, **the first three steps** aim to gather varied and multiple sets of data to inform **Step 4** of the process: the development of an individualized plan to inform placement, services, and progress monitoring.

### Steps 1–3: SLIFE Screening and Identification

The intake process should involve the generation of multiple data points as well as triangulation of data to develop a holistic understanding of a student's profile and determine whether they would benefit from receiving services associated with a SLIFE classification.

- Step 1: Pre-screener
- Step 2: Interview
- Step 3: Academic screeners

Step 4: SLIFE Services and Support

Based on the data gathered through Steps 1–3 (SLIFE screening and identification), the team may develop an individualized plan to support the student's academic, social, and emotional well-being, and to monitor progress. We present four focal areas of services and support:

- Academic and linguistic support
- Social-emotional support
- Family/caregiver and community connections
- Progress monitoring – and exiting SLIFE status

Step 2: Interview
Step 1: Pre-screener
Step 3: Academic screeners

Academic and linguistic support

Social-emotional support

Family/caregiver and community connections

Progress monitoring — and exiting SLIFE status
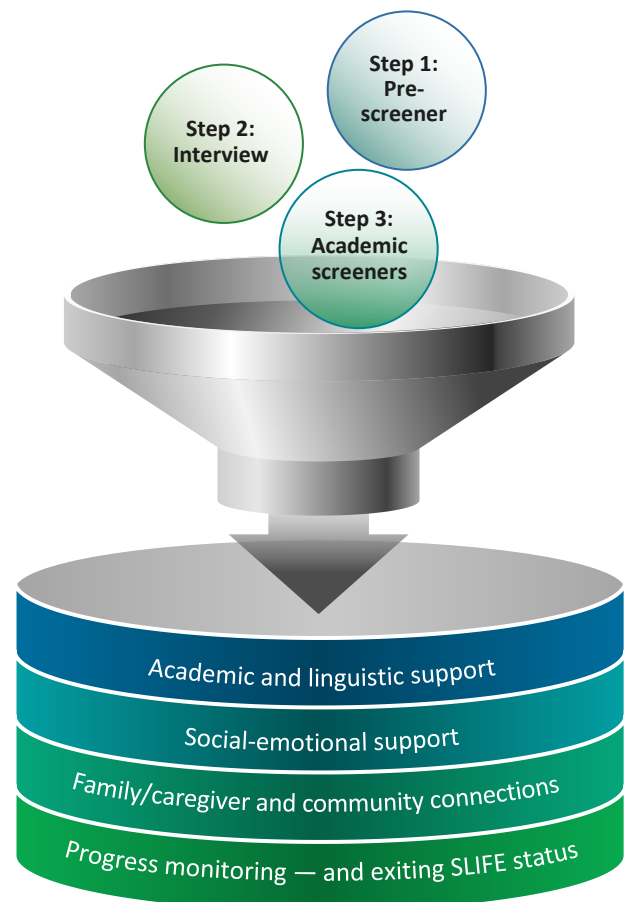
The next sections of this document offer guidance and sample resources for each step of the process.

Step 1: Administer the SLIFE Pre-Screener

Purpose: The purpose of Step 1 is to initially gauge whether a student *may* have gaps in formal education, and whether further screening for SLIFE status may be helpful.

Description: This section contains information about the use of a pre-screener to collect initial information about a student that may indicate potential SLIFE status. Completion of the pre-screener upon enrollment can help determine whether to continue with subsequent steps.

Directions: In your district or school, make sure it is clear who may be responsible for moving from the EL identification process into screening for SLIFE status. Then, administer the SLIFE pre-screener to *newly enrolled ELs who are 8 years old or older*.

School or district enrollment personnel should complete the SLIFE pre-screener only *after* the student has been identified as an EL but *before* Step 2, the SLIFE interview.

Complete as much of the SLIFE pre-screener as you can based on information already gathered through registration and the initial academic records review (if such records were available). If any pieces of information for the pre-screener are still missing, you may obtain them by talking with the student and/or caregiver, as your district/school deems appropriate.

Preparation:

Below are some ways that schools/districts may choose to prepare to identify and serve SLIFE.

- Consider training staff on topics such as:
  - Understanding the purpose of the SLIFE pre-screener.
  - Familiarization with the components of the SLIFE pre-screener.
  - How to administer each component of the SLIFE pre-screener in a consistent manner.
  - Practice sessions where staff members can role-play administering the SLIFE pre-screener.
  - District and school English learner and SLIFE intake processes.
- **Acquire necessary materials**: Gather all necessary materials for administering the SLIFE pre-screener.
- **Create an administration plan:** Develop a clear plan for administering the SLIFE pre-screener, including scheduling, logistics, and procedures for accommodating students as needed.
- **Evaluate and adjust**: After administering the pre-screener, evaluate the process to identify any areas for improvement and make adjustments as needed for future administrations.

Tool: See a SLIFE pre-screener form in Appendix A: The SLIFE Success Portfolio.

Vignette: The next pages offer two vignettes illustrating how two different districts might handle the SLIFE intake process.

Vignette: Yudi arrives at a large school system with a centralized intake process.

Yudi, a 12-year-old student from the Congo, arrives with his family to enroll in a large, urban Massachusetts school system with a centralized intake process. The office staff warmly welcomes them and, upon learning that the family's preferred language is French, quickly connects them with Pierre, a French-speaking family liaison.

Pierre greets Yudi and his family warmly, inviting them to a dialogue. To create a comfortable atmosphere, he shows Yudi some games on the coffee table, hoping to build trust and rapport. As they chat, Pierre gathers preliminary information and then administers the home language survey and WIDA screener, which identifies Yudi as an English Learner. Pierre explains the district's intake process to the family. Due to time constraints, they schedule a follow-up visit for the next day.

Based on the initial conversation and missing academic records, Pierre suspects that Yudi may have experienced significant interruptions in his formal education. Before the family leaves, Pierre conducts the SLIFE pre-screener (Step 1) and plans to work with the Welcome Center staff to investigate Yudi's previous educational experiences.

The following day, Pierre conducts the SLIFE interview (Step 2) with Yudi and his family to better understand Yudi's educational background. Yudi appears to be an active boy, excited to talk about his new school. Through the academic screening process (Step 3), Pierre notices that Yudi struggles with foundational literacy and number recognition. Throughout these interactions, Pierre also discusses potential community-based services with the family and listens for cues regarding social-emotional support needs.

After synthesizing all assessment data, Pierre convenes with the student intake team to present his findings. The team carefully reviews Yudi's profile and recommends his initial placement in the district's SLIFE program. Pierre then arranges a comprehensive meeting with Yudi's family to discuss their educational options. He outlines the various programs available, including the SLIFE program and other English Language Education (ELE) offerings, ensuring the family understands the benefits and structure of each. Pierre provides the required parental notifications for ELE programming, explaining them in detail. He also describes the SLIFE Services and Support Plan (Step 4), emphasizing how it will be used to monitor and support Yudi's academic progress, language development, and overall adjustment to the new school environment. Throughout the discussion, Pierre encourages questions and feedback from the family, aiming to empower them in making an informed decision about Yudi's educational journey.

Throughout the entire process, Pierre strives to be culturally and linguistically responsive, ensuring that Yudi and his family feel supported and informed as they navigate this new educational system.

Vignette: Nadia arrives at a small school system.

Nadia, a resilient 12-year-old girl from Afghanistan, embarks on a new chapter in her life as she steps into the hallways of a small Massachusetts school. Identified as an English learner, Nadia is warmly welcomed by Ms. Y, the lead ESL teacher, who greets both Nadia and her mother, Fatima. Unable to secure an in-person Dari interpreter, Ms. Y arranges for one to join via Zoom.

During the initial registration process, Ms. Y notices Nadia's incomplete academic records. Through the interpreter, Fatima confirms periods when circumstances beyond their control prevented Nadia from attending school. Sensitively, Ms. Y administers the SLIFE pre-screener (Step 1) and seamlessly transitions to the SLIFE interview (Step 2). Ms. Y knows this interview is more than a mere formality; it's a chance to understand Nadia's unique story, academic background, and learning preferences. Ms. Y listens attentively as Nadia and Fatima share glimpses of their past, learning that Nadia thrives on hands-on experiences, particularly enjoying puzzles, finger-weaving patterns, and mathematics.

To gauge Nadia's foundational skills in math and home-language literacy, Ms. Y conducts two short academic screeners (Step 3). While not perfect, these screeners provide teachers with an initial understanding of Nadia's academic abilities. As the teachers learn more about what Nadia can do in the classroom, they will adjust instruction as needed. Reviewing the results with Fatima, the interpreter, and Ms. Lyons (the math teacher), they observe that Nadia's current academic skills align more closely with elementary grades. However, considering all factors, including Nadia's age, the team decides it's developmentally appropriate to place her in middle school.

The educators and family acknowledge the significant challenges Nadia will face as she enters her new life in a Massachusetts middle school. Beyond dealing with the difficult circumstances that brought Nadia from her homeland to the school, Nadia will need to adjust to new surroundings and culture, develop English, learn new academic content, and build foundational skills missed during her interrupted education—all while navigating the complexities of adolescence.

To support Nadia's transition, the school implements a comprehensive plan. She will receive a double block of ESL with an intensified focus on literacy skills. Mr. Goggins, another ESL teacher, will provide additional support in math and science classes taught by SEI-endorsed teachers. The school also plans to facilitate Nadia's sense of belonging through a school orientation and by identifying a student buddy.

Ms. Y takes on the responsibility of coordinating Nadia's individualized success plan. This optional plan, distinct from the benchmark requirement, is developed and regularly updated through collaborative efforts with the grade-level team. It serves as a dynamic tool to track Nadia's progress and adjust support strategies as needed. Ms. Y facilitates meetings where teachers discuss Nadia's performance across classes, identifying strengths, areas for growth, and successful teaching strategies. Together, they set manageable short- and long-term goals for Nadia.

Nadia's individualized success plan complements the state-mandated benchmark assessments, providing a more holistic and personalized approach to her education. While the benchmarks offer standardized progress measurements, the success plan allows for tailored instruction and celebrates Nadia's unique achievements, promoting a comprehensive support system for her linguistic, academic, and social-emotional growth.

Step 2: Conduct the SLIFE Interview

Purpose: The purpose of Step 2 is to collect contextual information about the student's interests, goals, prior experiences with school, current living status, and preferred ways to be introduced to new teachers and the classroom.

Description: As part of a comprehensive approach to understanding each student's unique context, educators may conduct interviews to gather valuable insights. These interviews provide an opportunity to delve deeper into the student's background, experiences, and individual needs. The description below provides an overview of the optional interview process, and Appendix A includes a sample set of interview questions that may be used by districts, as they deem appropriate, to facilitate learning more about the student's educational background and experiences that may impact the student's learning.

> **Key idea: Take warm, supportive, and culturally and linguistically responsive approaches.**
>
> Any engagement with students and/or their caregivers should be conducted with a warm and welcoming demeanor, and in culturally and linguistically responsive ways.

Directions: Staff conducting SLIFE interviews should receive training on interview techniques and culturally and linguistically responsive approaches to ensure a comfortable and effective interview process. Whenever possible, bilingual and bicultural staff members should administer these interviews, as they can provide valuable linguistic and cultural insights.

When welcoming a student who may qualify for SLIFE status, the primary goal is to develop a holistic understanding of the child. This involves delving into various aspects of their life: who the student is, the nature of their interrupted schooling, past experiences that could impact their school performance, and the skills and knowledge they bring. By gathering this multifaceted information, educators can lay a strong foundation for the student's adjustment and tailor support systems to their specific strengths and needs.

It's important to remember that students and caregivers may initially be hesitant to share certain information. Interviewers should approach the process with respect and patience, understanding that as trust builds over time, students may feel more comfortable sharing additional details.

This initial interview is not just a data collection exercise but the beginning of an ongoing dialogue and relationship-building process, setting the stage for the student's educational journey in their new school environment.

> **Key idea: Select the right number of interview questions.**
>
> Avoid interview fatigue by strategically selecting interview questions that will yield new and contextual data to inform decisions about student placement, services, and support.

In Appendix A: Sample SLIFE Success Portfolio, you will find a large set of interview questions available for districts to draw from and customize as needed. Districts are encouraged to adapt the questions to yield the best information to support students in specific contexts—for example, by considering the student's age, level of comfort, or other circumstances. Given each student's situation (e.g., age, ability), consider whether a caregiver should be present in the interview, or serve as the main responder to the questions.

Additional suggestions for the interview:

- Districts may choose to use this type of interview with all newcomers as a way to plan introductions of students to school and to help better meet their educational strengths and needs.

- Share information from the interview with teachers, as deemed appropriate under the specific circumstance, to help them get to know the student, all the while balancing the goal of familiarizing educators with the student's background and the imperative to respect privacy. Implement a system for communicating essential details that prevents students or caregivers from having to repeatedly recount their experiences, especially potentially sensitive or traumatic ones. This approach helps create a supportive educational environment while protecting the student's and family's right to privacy and emotional well-being. During interviews with students and families/caregivers, sensitive information may be disclosed which school employees, as mandated reporters, may be legally obligated to report. For more information about mandatory reporting, please see: [Mandated Reporting - Student and Family Support (SFS)](#).

Preparation:

School districts may consider different ways to prepare for SLIFE interviews, if they choose to utilize them as part of their local practices. For example, school districts may:

- Consider training staff on topics such as:
  - Understanding the purpose of the district's chosen approach to the SLIFE interview.
  - Familiarization with the components of the interview.
  - How to conduct the interview in a consistent and welcoming manner.
  - Practice sessions where staff members can role-play conducting interviews with simulated students.
  - Storing, managing, and sharing (as appropriate) the information collected.
  - Setting up the interview space(s) in a way that makes students and families/caregivers feel welcome.
  - Creating a supportive and welcoming environment during the interview to help students and their families/caregivers feel comfortable.
  - Using [culturally and linguistically responsive](#), [trauma-informed](#), [asset-based](#) approaches.
  - Increasing knowledge about academic, extra-curricular, and community support that can be offered to students and caregivers/families as related topics come up in the interview.
- **Acquire necessary materials:** Gather all necessary materials for conducting the interview.
- **Create an administration plan:** Develop a clear plan for conducting the interview, including scheduling, logistics, and procedures for accommodating students as needed.
- **Evaluate and adjust:** After conducting the interview, evaluate the process to identify any areas for improvement and make adjustments as needed for future interviews.

Key idea: Partner with cultural brokers inside or outside the district.

Interpreters and cultural brokers from students' own communities may be helpful to understanding students' experiences before, during, and after migration, and supporting them as they enter a new school.

As students enter school after migration, they may be dealing with cultural differences, transient housing, frequent school mobility, and stress (not only from migration but also from learning new content, a new language, and a new culture). Below are examples that members of the SLIFE community of practice (CoP) have shared about how they have partnered with cultural brokers:

- One SLIFE CoP member shared that as families with SLIFE were housed in a nearby emergency shelter, the school coordinated with the shelter and local community organizations to complete school registration and screening at the shelter.
- Another CoP member shared that as they enrolled and screened students, the district hosted weekly joint educational orientations with local refugee resettlement agencies for families and children.
- A third CoP member discussed coordinating with local resettlement agencies to orient and provide counseling, social work services, and housing to newly arrived Afghan families.
- A fourth described coordinating with community agencies to connect families with housing, health, legal, and social-emotional support.

Tools: See a [sample interview form](#) in [Appendix A](#) that school districts may utilize as a resource.

Vignette: The vignette below illustrates how an interviewer may frame the SLIFE interview. Please note: this is just an example of how an optional SLIFE interview may be conducted by the district.

Vignette: Ms. Barbosa's considerations for conducting the SLIFE interview.

In the warmly lit room of the Family Intake Center of a medium-sized Massachusetts district, the interviewer, Ms. Barbosa, prepares for her meeting with a new student, Antônio, and his family. Drawing from her experience as a former ESL teacher, Ms. Barbosa, in her current dual role as coach and bilingual family liaison, is keenly aware of the importance of making a good first impression, especially during what could be a lengthy and intimidating registration process. She arranges the chairs in a semi-circle, a more inviting setup than the usual opposite ends of a table. The space is welcoming and comfortable.

Ms. Barbosa reviews the notes she has on Antônio, a young boy from Brazil with a bright, slightly nervous smile that likely obscures some of the challenges he may have faced in the journey that has brought him to this school. She reminds herself to speak slowly, to choose words that are clear and simple, and to listen—really listen—to what Antônio and his family have to say. She plans to speak in Portuguese, their shared language.

As she waits for them to arrive, Ms. Barbosa thinks about the balance she must strike. She needs to gather enough information to understand Antônio's educational needs without overwhelming him or his family. She wants to know about his previous schooling, interests, learning preferences, and educational dreams, but she also wants to learn about the person he is outside of the classroom. She considers how to phrase her questions to be open ended and encouraging, allowing Antônio to share his story at his own pace.

Ms. Barbosa decides to add images to interview questions. She has found that pictures can make abstract ideas more concrete. She also plans to introduce a bit of playfulness into the interview. She will weave in cultural references, like recent popular cartoons in Brazil or beloved typical foods like pão-de-queijo, and may ask specific questions about Antônio' hometown. If Antônio likes soccer, she may ask him about his favorite players. Perhaps Ms. Barbosa will introduce Antônio to a picture of the school mascot to continue to create a friendly atmosphere.

As Antônio and his family enter, Ms. Barbosa greets them with a warm smile. She begins with light topics, such as their first impressions of the town. She watches Antônio as he speaks, noting his body language and the ease with which he communicates. Ms. Barbosa is mindful of not just his words, but also the way they are spoken and the silences in between.

Throughout the interview, Ms. Barbosa remains patient and empathetic, knowing that this is just the first step in Antônio's educational journey in a new Massachusetts school. She is determined to make it a positive experience—one that will set the tone for his future learning and growth. Ms. Barbosa is aware that the information she gathers today will be crucial in helping Antônio receive the support he needs to thrive, not just academically, but socially and emotionally as well.

Step 3: Administer an Academic Background Screener

Purpose: Academic screeners can serve a range of purposes, including to:

- Screen for literacy and numeracy skills to better understand the student's current academic performance.
- Determine initial class placements and service decisions.
- Inform initial teaching and learning plans.
- Connect student assets and funds of knowledge to classroom instruction.
- Serve as a baseline from which to monitor student's performance and growth.

Description: This section contains sample processes and resources to generate approximate, preliminary understandings about the student's current academic performance.

Key idea: A holistic approach

The purpose of Step 3, academic screening, is not to pinpoint an exact grade level corresponding with the student's screening performance, but rather to get a picture of their foundational academic skills and whether gaps in formal education will require specialized supports to help them access grade-appropriate content, beyond what the standard English learner education program may generally provide.

The preliminary insights from the academic screeners in Step 3 provide a starting point for decisions on initial placement, instruction, and support for SLIFE. However, these screeners have limitations in accurately capturing SLIFE's abilities. As a result, districts may wish to use other approaches that they find useful to provide valuable information about the student's academic skills.

These initial understandings should be supplemented with ongoing classroom performance data. As educators gain a more comprehensive view of a student's linguistic and academic skills, and social-emotional well-being, they can adjust placement, instruction, and support accordingly.

Key idea: Beyond a single test

Identifying SLIFE and decisions about placement, programming, and services for SLIFE should not be made through one single test, but through consideration of various contextual factors.

Step 3 may also be an opportune time to reanalyze any prior student academic records. An important point to remember is that the number of years someone spent in formal educational settings is not always directly correlated with their levels of literacy, numeracy, or other academic skills.

Directions: After the SLIFE pre-screener (Step 1) indicates limited or interrupted education and the SLIFE interview (Step 2) is conducted, the school district may administer the academic screener(s) (Step 3) to SLIFE to gather an initial understanding of the student's foundational academic skills.

Note that, depending on the structure of enrollment and registration procedures within a district, screening processes may vary. In some districts where all steps are centralized, academic background

screening may occur during the enrollment process. Conversely, in other districts, academic background screening may take place after the student has started classes, or the decision may be made to conduct a rescreening later to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the student's needs once they have settled into the school environment.

Districts may choose to adopt, adapt, or develop their own approaches for the academic screening of SLIFE. Below you will find a list of sample academic screening resources currently in use across Massachusetts districts, as well as a vignette describing how a district chose and piloted academic screening resources. Moreover, in [Appendix B: Additional Resources for Step 3, Academic Screening](#), you will find a sample process to support districts in making decisions about academic screeners. Please note, it is only a sample, and each district should make its local decisions regarding the practices it may want to utilize in this area.

> **Key idea: Multiple ways to determine SLIFE status**
>
> If it is not possible to provide preferred-language screeners but other data sources (e.g., the SLIFE pre-screener, SLIFE interview, academic records review) indicate that the student has experienced limited and/or interrupted education, the district may want to identify the student as SLIFE until other data measures indicate otherwise.

Once the district selects its screening resources, staff who have been trained in screener administration may administer the screener(s) in the student's home or preferred language. If the screeners are not available in the student's primary language, they may not accurately reflect the student's current academic skills. Whenever possible, administer the screener(s) one-on-one to ensure the highest level of accuracy.

Preparation:

Below are some ways that schools/districts may choose to prepare to administer academic screeners to SLIFE.

- Consider training staff on topics such as:
  - Understanding the purpose of academic screening for SLIFE.
  - Familiarization with the components of the district's selected academic screener(s).
  - How to conduct the academic screener(s) in a consistent manner.
  - Practice sessions where staff members can role-play administering the academic screener(s) with simulated students.
  - Storing, managing, and sharing (as appropriate) the information collected.
  - Setting up the academic screening space.
  - Creating a supportive environment around the academic screener(s) to help students feel comfortable.
  - [Using culturally and linguistically responsive](#), [trauma-informed](#), [asset-based](#) approaches.

- **Acquire necessary materials:** Gather all necessary materials for administering the academic screener(s).
- **Create an administration plan:** Develop a clear plan for administering the academic screener(s), including who will administer the screeners (e.g., district or school level staff?), who may need to be trained on how to administer them, scheduling, logistics, and procedures for accommodating students as needed.
- **Evaluate and adjust:** After administering the academic screener(s), evaluate the process to identify any areas for improvement and make adjustments as needed for future administrations.

Tools: Sample List of Academic Screening Resources [5]

(See also Appendix B: Additional Resources for Step 3, Academic Screening)

Literacy Screening Resources (literacy only)

- From New Bedford Public Schools (New Bedford, MA):
  - SLIFE Writing Assessment: Paragraph Starters
  - SLIFE Writing Assessment
- From the Florida Department of Education
  - Native Language Assessment Literacy Screening Tool (available in 29 languages)
- From Minneapolis Public Schools and the University of Minnesota (Minneapolis and Saint Paul, MN)
  - Native Language Literacy Assessment (NLLA) (available in eight languages)
- From the New York State Department of Education:
  - Writing screener and rubric (available in 15 languages)

Numeracy Screening Resources (numeracy only)

- From the Department – the following optional resources are designed to be used in tandem to help educators (1) identify expected grade-level numeracy skills in relation to same-aged peers and (2) select assessment activities that can measure these skills.
  - Massachusetts SLIFE Numeracy Protocol
  - Massachusetts Mathematics Framework Progressions Chart for SLIFE

---

[5] *Reference in this document to any third-party links, specific public or commercial products, processes, or services, or the use of any trade, firm, or corporation name is for the information and convenience of the public and does not constitute endorsement or recommendation by DESE. Our office is not responsible for and does not in any way guarantee the accuracy of information on other sites accessible through links herein. DESE may supplement this list with other links, services and products that meet the specified criteria. For more information contact:* el@doe.mass.edu

- From Lawrence Public Schools:
  - [SLIFE Math Diagnostic](#)
- From New Bedford Public Schools:
  - [Math Foundations Screening Assessment (Developmental Sequence)](#)
  - [SLIFE Math Assessment](#)
- From Fairfax County Public Schools (Fairfax County, VA)
  - [Entry Assessment Mathematics Evaluation (EAME)](#)

Literacy and Numeracy Screening Resources (includes both literacy and numeracy)

- From the Mississippi Department of Education:
  - [Supports for English Learner Students with Limited or Inconsistent/Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE): A practical approach for Mississippi educators](#): Pages 22–23 offer suggestions for academic screeners for math, home language, science, and social studies. Appendices A–D showcase additional screener samples.

Vignette: On the next page, a vignette illustrates how a district chose to use a specific academic screening tool.

Academic screening snapshot: Choosing academic screening resources

A mid-sized school district in Massachusetts approached the task of selecting academic screening tools for SLIFE with a blend of practicality and resolve. An active member of the SLIFE Community of Practice (CoP), District X engaged in thoughtful deliberation. Along with the CoP, district staff had the opportunity to review literature, hear from experts in the field, and have discussions with other districts facing similar challenges. The outcome was a decision to customize a screener from a neighboring district, chosen for its practicality and adaptability.

A series of considerations informed this decision: District X considered the screener's ability to provide timely and actionable data, required time for completion, ease of administration, staff training, and how well the screener results could be integrated with the district's existing processes to monitor and support student progress over time. Ultimately, the goal was to identify a screening approach that could gather essential information responsibly and efficiently without overburdening students or staff.

As part of piloting the newly customized screener, Mr. Batista met Carlos, a shy 15-year-old boy from El Salvador. Mr. Batista prepared for the meeting by reading through Carlos's academic records and the previously administered SLIFE interview. As Carlos arrived for the screener, Mr. Batista greeted him warmly in Spanish. Mr. Batista, informed by the records of Carlos's interview, began a conversation about light topics. This gentle dialogue served a dual purpose: to build rapport and to glean insights into Carlos's funds of knowledge, which would later be connected to classroom instruction. It allowed Mr. Batista to connect with Carlos on a personal level and to begin understanding the wealth of knowledge Carlos brought with him.

The academic screener unfolded as a series of conversations through tasks. It felt more like a dialogue than a test. Carlos was asked to read and write sentences and paragraphs, and solve mathematical problems, but the focus was not on finding a precise grade-level match for his abilities. Instead, Mr. Batista observed Carlos's conceptual understanding of numbers, problem-solving strategies, and textual sense making. Rather than looking for errors, Mr. Batista looked for indications of Carlos's foundational academic skills. The screener was not about perfection, but about understanding Carlos's general academic framework and what kind of support he would need to succeed in his new classes. It was a process that acknowledged the student's current state without judgment, focusing on how the district could best support his entry into the classroom.

The results from Carlos's screeners offered practical initial data points to inform teachers about Carlos's strengths and the areas where he may need the most attention and support. It was a process grounded in the understanding that it takes time and effort to fully integrate students into their new academic environment. The district's philosophy was clear: a single test is merely a snapshot, one piece of a larger puzzle. An accumulation of data points from various sources (e.g., academic records and intake information, student and family interview, academic screeners, classroom teacher input) and the continuous observation of Carlos's progress would shape his educational path.

As the district continues to pilot the newly adapted screener, it remains committed to refining its screening process, guided by feedback and the evolving needs of its students and educators.

Step 4: Develop a SLIFE Services and Support Plan

Purpose: The purpose of Step 4, SLIFE Services and Support, is to develop an optional individualized plan to support the student's academic and linguistic goals, to support their social-emotional well-being, and to monitor progress.

Description: SLIFE often need specialized assistance, beyond what an English learner education program usually provides, to facilitate their academic success and overall well-being. This section offers descriptions of promising characteristics[6] and examples of what schools may do in four focal areas of SLIFE services and support:
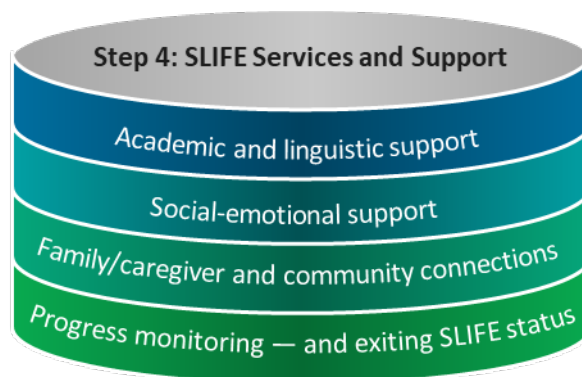
- Academic and linguistic support
- Social-emotional support
- Family and community connections
- Progress monitoring and exiting SLIFE status

> **Key idea: Navigating SLIFE services and support: a flexible approach**
>
> The descriptions of the four focal areas for SLIFE services and support in this section are not meant to be a prescription or a checklist. Given the heterogeneity of the SLIFE population and the variety of school contexts in which they are received (e.g., low or high enrollment numbers, rural or urban settings, brand new or well-established programs), SLIFE services and support may look different in each setting. The descriptions and examples in this section serve as *suggestions and ideas* for each district or school to a) prioritize student well-being and success, and b) determine its own approach to SLIFE services and support.

Directions: Once steps 1–3 (pre-screener, interview, and academic screening) have been completed, and the student is identified as SLIFE, the district can consider how to use the data collected to create a plan to support the student's academic and linguistic goals, social-emotional well-being, and to monitor progress.

---

[6] Characteristics of promising practices summarized from Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017); Understanding and Supporting Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) in Massachusetts: A Review of Literature (CAL, 2020); materials from the Massachusetts SLIFE Community of Practice; and AIR's report on the Massachusetts SLIFE Research Project (forthcoming, Kray & Burns, 2024).

Preparation:

Planning district structures and preparing district staff to develop a robust service and support plan for students identified as SLIFE involves a well-informed and thoughtful approach.

- Consider training staff on topics such as:
  - Understanding the unique characteristics and heterogeneity of SLIFE
  - Taking a person-centered approach (e.g., consider the student's background experiences, their hopes and dreams, and incorporate their assets)
  - Cultural competency
  - Trauma-informed practices
  - Collaboration skills
  - Promoting an inclusive and supportive environment
  - Teaching frameworks, strategies, and approaches designed specifically for SLIFE.
- **Familiarize staff with available resources for SLIFE:** dedicate common meeting times and professional learning opportunities for staff to delve into available educational programs; academic, linguistic, and social-emotional support; and services available through community partnerships.
- **Create an administration plan:** Develop a clear process for developing the SLIFE service plan, including scheduling, logistics, how students and caregivers may be involved in crafting of the optional plan, how students will be accommodated as needed during such process, how communication will happen among stakeholders, and how often the plan may be reviewed and adjusted.
- **Evaluate and adjust**: After developing and implementing the plan, evaluate the process to identify areas for improvement and adjust as needed.

Tools: Some school districts may find it helpful to consider the use of a **SLIFE Success Portfolio**, a holistic and collaborative approach to developing and maintaining a SLIFE Success Plan (see Appendix A: Sample SLIFE Success Portfolio). Appendix A also presents examples of SLIFE Success Plans (e.g., The Department's SLIFE Success Template), but such use is entirely optional. Districts should be aware that this optional plan differs from the mandated benchmark requirement.

> **Key idea: Guiding SLIFE journeys: A collaborative portfolio approach**
>
> Upon identification of a student under SLIFE status, a SLIFE Success Portfolio offers a systematic structure for the holistic gathering of multiple sources of data, the inclusion of various voices (including those of students and caregivers), and the development of a living repository of information about the student. This information can be used for collaborative decision making about the best supports, experiences, and pathways to meet the student's goals and can follow the student from teacher to teacher and school to school and support short- and long-term decision making about the most promising ways to support the student's well-being and success.

Descriptions of the Four Focal Areas for SLIFE Services and Support

Academic and Linguistic Support

Purpose: Given significant interruptions in formal schooling, SLIFE may need specialized, asset-based assistance to succeed in Massachusetts classrooms. The purpose of academic and linguistic support is to provide SLIFE with responsive and equitable access to high-quality language and content development so they can achieve their full potential in the educational setting.

Description: Students designated as SLIFE are a diverse group. Whereas some recommendations for academic and linguistic services and support overlap with effective practices for ELs more generally, others are specific to SLIFE. For example, in addition to learning new content and the English language, SLIFE may also be working to develop foundational numeracy and literacy skills in their home language.

Visit the MA SLIFE Toolkit to access various resources related to academic and linguistic support.

Sample characteristics of promising academic and linguistic services and support for SLIFE are summarized below. Additionally, various resources related to this topic appear in the MA SLIFE Toolkit.

- Orient the full educational experience toward equity.
  - **Foster authentic dialogue**: Create participatory processes that foster engagement, interaction, dialogue, community building, interdependence, and space for centering multiple voices.
  - **Value student assets**: Acknowledge, value, and incorporate SLIFE's funds of knowledge, languages, cultures, histories, identities, and backgrounds into instruction, as appropriate. Incorporate SLIFE's existing skills, knowledge, and background experiences into academic educational experiences and connect this with content.
  - **Sustain languages:** Engage in linguistically sustaining practices to promote and leverage students' home languages. When SLIFE use their home languages, they communicate ideas and feelings with families and communities, build trusting relationships, and develop their identities. This also allows SLIFE to explore similarities and differences between the home language and English, and to develop greater conceptual understandings in both.
  - **Sustain cultures:** Engage in culturally sustaining practices to support SLIFE to draw on their own experiences and cultures in the school setting and make meaning of experiences and learning. Organize instruction around culturally relevant themes.
- Offer explicit, systematic, and sustained language development.
  - **Develop the English language**: When providing ESL to SLIFE, school districts may adjust their curriculum and instructional support to consider the students' educational background, linguistic inventories, cultural knowledge, and academic experience. SLIFE may benefit from a specially designed, rigorous ESL curriculum, taught by ESL teachers who understand the students' culture, with opportunities for inclusion and integration with non-EL peers.
  - **Develop the home language and offer bilingual support**: Leverage home languages to support the development of English. Bilingual supports may be a key way to provide SLIFE with access to

content. Whereas districts where many SLIFE share the same language may have greater access to bilingual resources (e.g., bilingual teachers and assistants), districts with fewer enrolled SLIFE or with a greater diversity of languages may find it helpful to model metalinguistic strategies in instruction and employ strategies such as peer assistance.

- **Use academic content as the vehicle for language development:** Promote linguistic development through meaningful, content-rich, multimodal texts, tasks, and practices.

- **Address all three dimensions of language**: Go beyond vocabulary to address the discourse, sentence, and word/phrase dimensions of language.

- **Embrace multimodal communication**: Engage students in multiple communication modes (receptive: listening, reading, and interpreting; and productive: speaking, writing, and representing). The communication modes are interrelated, but often develop at different rates. This means a student might be stronger in one area than another. Design multimodal learning activities that use SLIFE's strengths in one area to support language development in another (e.g., pictorial to oral; oral to written).

- **Create space for ample oral practice**: provide daily, sustained opportunities for SLIFE to develop oral language skills. While some SLIFE may appear quiet in class, it's important not to automatically associate this with learning difficulties. Instead, recognize that these students might be diligently working on comprehension and listening.

> ### Tip: Understanding linguistic diversity in home and instructional languages
>
> Keep in mind that a student's home language may differ from the primary language of instruction in their home country. For example, some students from Guatemala or El Salvador might speak an indigenous Mayan language at home but receive instruction in Spanish at school. Similarly, students from Cape Verde may use Cape Verdean Creole at home but be taught in Portuguese within the educational setting. Students from Haiti may speak Haitian Creole at home but have attended school in French. Such variety underscores the importance of recognizing and valuing the diverse linguistic backgrounds of SLIFE.

- Develop literacy and numeracy.

- **Develop intensely**: Foundational literacy and numeracy practices are critical access points to grade-level disciplinary learning. Provide intensive instruction tailored to the strengths, needs, and proficiency levels of SLIFE in literacy and numeracy.

- **Support student skill transfer in numeracy**: Build on previous numeracy skills. SLIFE may often engage in complex mathematical processes, but perhaps not yet express this in formal ways.

- **Support student skill transfer in literacy**: While some SLIFE may have nascent literacy skills in their home languages, others may be able to transfer significant home language reading and writing skills to support the development of English.

- **Form a bridge from oral language skills to written literacy**: Tap into student strengths with spoken communication and create pathways for them to transfer those abilities into the written word. This approach capitalizes on what students already know, providing a familiar foundation from which to build their literacy skills.

Snapshot: Form a bridge from oral language skills to written literacy

One member from the SLIFE Community of Practice shared a powerful strategy aimed at fostering a collaborative classroom literacy experience. The approach begins with oral language activities, setting the stage for later engagement with written text. Initially, students gather in same-language small groups, where they participate in a structured discussion.

During one session, a student named Mateo captivates his peers by recounting a recent event, seamlessly weaving English and Spanish into his narrative. As Mateo shares his story, his classmates, each assigned a specific role, pose questions that prompt Mateo to clarify his thoughts and elaborate on key details.

Following this interactive discussion, Mateo revisits his narrative in a second round, this time with either the teacher or a peer acting as a scribe. As Mateo recounts the event, the scribe transcribes his words, capturing the essence of his story. This process allows Mateo to refine his storytelling skills, as he learns to omit irrelevant information, include pertinent details, and structure his narrative more effectively. Mateo is then supported to practice reading the transcribed text. This supports Mateo's growing literacy skills by offering him an opportunity to engage with written language that directly reflects his own oral expression.

- Focus on academic content development:
  - **Center students in academic learning**: Build relationships with students and learn about their unique backgrounds—make learning meaningful and relevant to SLIFE, and guide students to find purpose in it.
  - **Integrate content and language**: Integrate language development with content learning as appropriate. Provide SLIFE—along with all students—with opportunities to engage with the content, with each other, and with the larger school community to develop language, literacy, and disciplinary understandings.
  - **Accelerate Access to Grade-Level Curriculum**: Strategically target instruction to address gaps in disciplinary knowledge to help SLIFE quickly access grade-level curriculum.
  - **Keep real-world professionals in mind**: Develop tasks that reflect the mindsets, habits, and practices of professionals in the field (e.g., scientist, engineer, mechanic, author).
  - **Structure learning through discussion-rich, hands-on projects:** Project-based learning (PBL) and discussion-based classrooms create an infrastructure for students to inquire, investigate, co-construct, reflect on, and publicly demonstrate knowledge. PBL provides opportunities to make learning meaningful for SLIFE, who benefit from hands-on approaches that are directly relevant and applicable to their lives.
  - **Use theme-based and interdisciplinary curriculum and assessment.** A theme-based curriculum and assessment design exposes SLIFE to a set of literacy skills and concepts in context. This helps students connect new learning to what they already know, internalize learning, and use their newly gained knowledge and skills more effectively. This approach may emphasize theme-aligned essential questions, cross-curricular or interdisciplinary vocabulary, and social-emotional learning

(SEL) competencies. If applied school-wide, a thematic curriculum and assessment design can also facilitate the transfer of skills and knowledge, allowing SLIFE to learn faster.

- Scaffold and differentiate learning.

  - **Scaffold and support in dialogue/interaction with the student**: Scaffolding is an interactionally driven, collaborative process of supporting student development toward what they cannot *yet* do independently. The goal of scaffolding is to build autonomy by engaging the student in meaningful and challenging activities while providing responsive and balanced support. Rather than relying on one-size-fits-all, static supports, aim for flexibility and responsiveness in the types of scaffolds you provide. SLIFE are a diverse group; therefore, strategies that work for one student may be different than what works for another. Scaffolding maintains high expectations for all students, then offers the "just right" amount of support as students continue to take over and demonstrate new learning (Walqui & van Lier, 2010).

  - **Multiple pathways and multimodality**: Apply Universal Design for Learning guidelines, offering multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression.

  - **Bridge experiences**: Incorporate features of familiar learning paradigms (e.g., collaborative work that may be similar to some SLIFE's pre-migration experiences) to bridge into learning paradigms commonly found in Massachusetts schools (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010). Considering the significant adjustments that SLIFE are likely to experience in new home and school environments, a gradual introduction to various aspects of socialization and learning could alleviate some potentially overwhelming feelings in the new surroundings.

  - **Collaborate and work in groups**: Collaboration may be particularly beneficial to SLIFE who come from more collectivistic than individualistic cultures (DeCapua & Marshall 2010). Offer small group instruction to provide targeted support and individualized attention to SLIFE as appropriate. Use flexible grouping strategies based on students' proficiency levels, home languages, academic needs, and learning preferences to maximize engagement.

  - **Create stable structures and routines**: When systematically implemented, instructional routines provide structure and consistency, and help to create a predictable environment for all students, including SLIFE. The use of instructional routines can help reduce the cognitive load associated with learning new material; instead of dedicating significant time to learning the structure of how to complete new tasks, students can focus on learning the new academic concepts presented. The same instructional routines can be replicated across content areas with differentiated scaffolding to support both SLIFE and non-SLIFE peers. Examples of instructional routines include think-pair-share, think-write-pair-share, adapted writing with colors, reciprocal teaching, guided reading, close reading protocol, number talks, and problem-solving cycles.

Snapshot: Stable structures and routines

When members from the SLIFE Community of Practice visited a local high school, visitors observed how the administration and teachers collaborate to establish stable structures and routines across classrooms to support all students, including SLIFE. Every Monday, students begin their day with a schoolwide community meeting. They begin by engaging in a think-pair-share activity to discuss a thought-provoking question related to the week's theme. This routine helps set a positive tone for the school day and encourages SLIFE to participate in discussions and interact with their peers. Throughout the day, teachers implement instructional routines such as adapted writing with colors during language arts lessons, where students use different-colored pens to highlight ideas in their writing, vocabulary words, and writing conventions. During math class, students engage in number talks, where they share their strategies for solving math problems and learn from one another's approaches. Additionally, teachers use reciprocal teaching during guided reading sessions, allowing students to take turns leading discussions about the text and supporting each other's comprehension.

These instructional routines are consistently replicated across content areas with differentiated scaffolding strategies to meet the diverse needs of SLIFE and non-SLIFE alike. By establishing these routines schoolwide, the school ensures a consistent and predictable learning environment.

- **Extend learning opportunities and help students pursue individualized pathways**. Older SLIFE may experience difficulty earning enough credits to meet graduation requirements. Some districts have addressed this challenge by extending learning beyond regular classroom hours. Some SLIFE may benefit from credit recovery, GED and HiSET preparation, early college/dual enrollment, and school to career options. Creative alternatives for credit recovery may include contextual learning options such as service learning, community-based learning, project-based learning, or community learning.

  – **Pre-ninth grade programs may help** prepare SLIFE for the high school experience and curriculum.

  – **After-school academic programs, Saturday school, vacation acceleration academies, tutoring, and community college partnerships** may build opportunities for SLIFE to progress more quickly through graduation requirements and transition into career or college opportunities.

Snapshot: Extending learning opportunities with early college

During a visit to a local high school, members of the SLIFE Community of Practice observed a promising initiative: all high school students, including SLIFE, participate in dual enrollment courses offered on the high school campus through a partnership with a state university. These courses, offered twice a week during the flexible intervention block, offer students early college credits and encompass diverse subjects such as photography, entrepreneurship, and Spanish for heritage speakers.

One notable aspect of this program is the dedicated support provided to SLIFE by the early college staff. Not only do they assist SLIFE with their coursework, but they also offer guidance and encouragement to promote their academic success. Additionally, select school staff members have been granted authorization to serve as adjunct lecturers, further enriching the learning experience for students.

The program's success is evident in its impressive pass rate, with 97% of participants passing their courses in 2023. This achievement underscores the effectiveness of the collaborative efforts between the high school, early college staff, and university partners in providing valuable educational opportunities to SLIFE.

- Summer enrichment programs, extracurricular programs, or multicultural enrichment options provide SLIFE with social and emotional support that goes beyond academics.

Snapshot: Summer programs

One member of the SLIFE Community of Practice described a summer program intentionally tailored to the unique needs and backgrounds of newcomers, including SLIFE, entering Grades 5–9. Embracing an assets-based philosophy, the enrichment curriculum is designed not only to challenge students academically but also to foster language growth and cultivate a sense of belonging.

One of the key aspects of the program is its emphasis on building strong relationships between students and teachers. Through interactive and collaborative learning experiences, students are encouraged to connect with their educators, fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment. Furthermore, the program serves as a bridge between newly arrived families and district educators. By involving families in their children's education and creating opportunities for them to engage with school staff, the program seeks to establish a sense of trust and partnership within the community.

- **Consider alternative pathways to graduation:** Districts can collaborate with individual students to identify pathways that align with their unique goals and interests and dismantle barriers that might hinder students from accessing certain pathways, which could otherwise keep them engaged in school.
- **Plan for post-secondary transition**: Proactively plan to help SLIFE successfully transition to postsecondary education, vocational training, or employment opportunities. Support SLIFE with

career exploration, college readiness activities, assistance with college applications, financial aid, and job placement, as appropriate.

- **Expanded graduation timeframes**: Some schools have emphasized that at times older SLIFE simply may need additional time to obtain their diplomas. As a result, they optimize class schedules with combined courses and redefine the timeframe for graduation—for example, by developing a 5- or 6-year course sequence rather than the traditional 4-year sequence.

Snapshot: Flexible, alternative pathways

Another school district described a unique program tailored to meeting the needs of older students with interruptions in formal educational. The program maintains a high degree of flexibility to accommodate students from both traditional and non-traditional schooling backgrounds. For example, the program operates through extended hours, remaining open 12 hours a day and offering programs during the summer. This extended access to educational services allows students to accommodate work and family schedules, progress at their own pace, and access additional academic assistance when needed. The program develops individualized learning plans for each student.

Instead of relying on conventional letter grades (A, B, C, D, F) and grade levels (9, 10, 11, 12), the program adopted a competency-based framework centered on what students can do. Students in the program receive personalized learning experiences tailored to their specific strengths and needs.

Social-Emotional Support

Purpose: To plan aspects of SLIFE services and support that foster a student sense of belonging, inclusivity, and well-being.

Description: This section explores promising strategies aimed at supporting the social-emotional well-being of students identified as SLIFE. It underscores the importance of creating a sense of belonging and inclusivity by considering the diverse cultural, linguistic, and experiential backgrounds of SLIFE and acknowledging the challenges they encounter during their transition into Massachusetts schools. SLIFE have often experienced difficult circumstances and trauma. Some of these experiences may lead to a need for individualized clinical care from therapists and other professionals beyond the school, while others may be addressed through regular social-emotional learning (SEL) activities integrated into the curriculum and services that may be provided by the school.

> Visit the MA SLIFE Toolkit to access various resources related to social-emotional support.

Sample characteristics of promising social-emotional services and supports for SLIFE are summarized below. Various resources related to this topic appear in the MA SLIFE Toolkit.

- **Implement trauma-informed instruction:** Teachers and teaching assistants are often the primary source of social-emotional support for SLIFE. Training staff to be culturally aware, responsive to refugee experiences, and supportive of students who have experienced trauma is essential. It's important to recognize that trauma can manifest differently across cultures. Implementing such practices may involve administrative support, trauma-sensitive classroom practices, and collaboration among school staff and mental health professionals. This approach focuses on building knowledge about trauma, fostering emotionally healthy school cultures, and promoting self-care for both students and educators.

- **Create a welcoming school environment** that respects students' backgrounds. Various strategies can help to establish strong relationships between students and school staff to foster a sense of belonging. For example:
  - Introduce students to the school through pictures and videos.
  - Accompany students to their bus during their first days in the school or longer, if appropriate.
  - Have regular staff–student check-ins.
  - Offer access to support services like a wellness center.
  - Celebrate diversity through schoolwide events.

- **Establish a peer ambassador program:** Peer ambassadors can offer SLIFE tips to successfully navigate the new environment and help them get acquainted with both explicit and "non-written" rules of school life.

- **Hire or partner with community counseling staff:** Many schools struggle to hire enough bilingual counselors with the appropriate training to meet the unique experiences and traumas of SLIFE. Community partnerships offer a potential solution to provide additional support.

- **Schoolwide initiatives** designed to provide social-emotional support for SLIFE can benefit all students within a school. For example, activities such as setting classroom norms or developing a social contract can be expanded to a schoolwide level to foster a welcoming and inclusive school culture for all. Still, careful consideration of diverse social-emotional needs of SLIFE and cultural contexts is necessary to promote cultural responsiveness and sensitivity in the design of such initiatives (Salva & Matis, 2017; Saulsbury-Molina, 2019).

- Implement strengths-based, student-centered instruction:

  - **Develop caring relationships:** Show patience, flexibility, and empathy for SLIFE; build their self-confidence through affirmation. This is the foundation for a trauma-informed and culturally responsive classroom environment.

  - **Emphasize authentic voice**: Elevate the perspectives and agency of SLIFE and their community.

  - **Honor the past and build bridges to the future**: Critically center dynamic community languages, valued practices, and knowledge. Acknowledge SLIFE backgrounds, knowledge, skills, interests, experiences, resilience, and hope—use these as the foundation for developing culturally responsive programs and classroom experiences, and as bridges for new learning.

- **Implement aspects of social-emotional well-being into instruction that is directly relevant to SLIFE:** When SLIFE feel that their backgrounds are understood and valued in the classroom, it fosters engagement and well-being, promoting both academic and social-emotional development. For deeper student engagement and learning, materials should make real-world connections and be immediately relevant to SLIFE. For instance, increase relevance by incorporating family pictures into genetics lessons or discussing personal eating habits for nutrition. Teachers can also integrate students' home life knowledge, such as agriculture or construction, into instruction in culturally responsive ways (DeCapua & Marshall, 2020).

Snapshot: Implement instruction that is relevant for SLIFE

In his high school biology class, Mr. Georges noticed that Ahmed, a pupil identified as SLIFE, had a keen interest in cooking. Wanting to make the lessons more relevant to Ahmed's experiences and interests, Mr. Georges incorporated food science concepts into the upcoming unit on chemistry. He used examples of chemical reactions in cooking, such as baking bread and caramelizing sugar, to explain concepts like oxidation and the Maillard reaction. During lab activities, Mr. Georges encouraged Ahmed to share his knowledge of cooking techniques and ingredient interactions, allowing him to feel valued and engaged in the lesson.

When Mr. Georges discovered that Maria, also identified as SLIFE, had a passion for gardening, he decided to incorporate a hands-on gardening project into the plant biology unit. Students were tasked with designing and conducting experiments to investigate factors that affect seed germination and plant growth. Maria shared her expertise on different soil types, composting, and sustainable gardening practices, which enriched the class discussions and experimental design. Her classmates were able to learn from her experiences, and Maria felt empowered to contribute her knowledge to the high-school level scientific inquiry.

By incorporating students' interests and experiences into the curriculum, Mr. Georges not only made the lessons more engaging and relevant but also fostered an inclusive learning environment where SLIFE could share their unique perspectives and feel valued for their contributions.

- **Engage in promising intercultural communication** to foster a supportive classroom environment. Maintain ongoing, two-way communication: Listen to students and families, endeavor to understand their backgrounds, and establish structures and resources for communicating with families and caregivers.

Family and Community Connections

Purpose: Establish strong family/caregiver and community partnerships that support SLIFE social-emotional well-being, academic success, and overall development.

Description: Successful programs connect to students' families, home learning cultures, and communities in a variety of ways. Connecting with SLIFE families/caregivers recognizes the important role that they play in SLIFE's educational journeys and seeks to involve them as active participants in the educational process.

Key idea: Partnerships are essential for developing wraparound services that address the diverse needs of SLIFE.

Beyond the family/caregiver unit, partnerships can involve community-based organizations that have the cultural and linguistic knowledge necessary to effectively serve as bridges between schools and families. Reliance on community partnerships is a common strategy across school districts to develop wraparound services for students and their families. These partnerships can be particularly extensive for refugee students and families, often involving resettlement agencies and organizations that support transitions. Additionally, partnerships with community organizations, such as local sports clubs (e.g., soccer teams), have proven advantageous for students, fostering cross-cultural connections, developing social-emotional competencies, and promoting inclusive environments.

Visit the MA SLIFE Toolkit to access various resources related to family and community connections.

When rooted in genuine relationships with students, families, and community members, the sample actions listed below can contribute to SLIFE academic success, social-emotional health, and overall well-being. Various resources related to this topic appear in the MA SLIFE Toolkit.

- **Learn about and honor students' communities:** Deepen understanding of SLIFE and their communities by learning about their cultures, languages, and experiences.
  - **Home visits:** Educators can use home visits to build rapport with families, gain families' trust, and provide information about how the school works. Home visits can be implemented in many ways, including virtually. Teachers in various Massachusetts schools have conducted home visits and community walks to gain insights into SLIFE backgrounds and enhance cultural representation in the curriculum.
  - **School events:** Involving SLIFE families in school events, such as inviting caregivers to share about their home countries and cultures at assemblies, fosters mutual respect and understanding within the school community.
  - **Welcoming environments:** Honoring SLIFE's cultural communities can be achieved through actions like posting signs with images and text in different languages, showcasing SLIFE home countries in visual displays and events, and creatively incorporating aspects of SLIFE home cultures into school activities, such as growing fruits and vegetables from their home countries in a school garden.

- **Form partnerships to support students and families**: Such partnerships facilitate provision of essential services such as:

  – **Translation and interpretation services**: In Massachusetts, many school districts have in-house bilingual family liaisons and/or interpreters. Some smaller districts use third-party interpretation services that allow teachers to communicate with caregivers in any language.

  – **Provision for basic needs:** Newcomer and refugee families frequently arrive in Massachusetts facing significant socioeconomic challenges. Collaborations between schools and local communities can play a crucial role in addressing these needs. Additionally, school partnerships have been able to provide essentials like school supplies, basic hygiene kits (e.g., soap, toothbrushes and toothpaste, menstrual products), have dental clinics provide service to students at school, and connect families with support for housing, clothing, health care, and legal services.

  – **Parent courses**: Many districts offer night classes as a way for families to learn English. Community partnerships can expand these programs to offer family courses in job skills, cultural orientation, and understanding the U.S. legal system.

  – **Information about school-related community policies and practices**. Families may find it helpful to receive information about the legal and policy contexts that guide the schools their children attend (e.g., local, state, and federal policies).

  – **Career guidance**: Local organizations can help students and families discover a range of career options. Within school settings, community members and neighbors can offer valuable insights into different career prospects.

> ### Snapshot: Community partnerships
>
> SomerViva, in the Office of Immigrant Affairs in Somerville, offers community services in various languages, such as guidance for where residents can find food and rental assistance, information and referrals for legal assistance, and courses in topics such as financial education.

Snapshot: Insights From a Youth Organization

One SLIFE Community of Practice member has been working with a youth community organization. We asked: What advice would you give to a school that is just beginning to engage in community partnerships?

- **Positionality, reflection, and self-reflection**: Ongoing trainings, individual reflection, and "inventories" of my own identities, prejudices, strengths, and areas of growth have been tremendously helpful for me. As a White non-Latinx male born in the U.S., whose first language is English and second Spanish, I have had to unlearn and relearn a lot about how I see myself and others. I came into this work thinking that I knew a lot and had done a lot of work on myself, such as anti-racism work, but I've realized I need to continually strengthen areas that I thought were already "strong" and acknowledge areas where I need a lot more "strength training". There is a space for looking at ourselves compassionately in the mirror and continually developing our understanding of how we move in the world, and how we can be open to learning more about ourselves and others. Reflecting on my identities around race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc., learning more about my mental health and that of others, and identifying my own strengths as well those of others has been deeply beneficial in both my personal and professional life. I realize that if I want to collaborate with others in making positive changes, I need to also work on making positive changes in myself.

- **Active listening and holding space**: Listening and showing kindness is always a helpful practice!. People don't necessarily need my "help", advice, or solutions. Sometimes people just want to be heard and seen. Sometimes all that is needed is to just sit with someone and listen to them. Scheduling regular meetings with community partners, particularly in-person at the school, is very beneficial for ongoing relationship-building and collaboration.

- **Community nights**: One way to connect families, schools, and community partners is hosting community nights, complete with interpreters, food, transportation, and childcare, if possible. Attendees could sit in a big circle, and the families/caregivers could be asked what they need, and have their voice heard and respected. Ideas and action steps could be built out from that input, along with continued collaboration, communication, and follow-up meetings.

- **Multicultural nights**: Multicultural nights organized by student clubs are another great way for families to build relationships with one another, school staff, and community partners. Multicultural nights at local middle schools have included student DJs, live music and dance performances from students and families, and tables piled high with free food representing different countries and cultures! Students, families, and staff wore soccer jerseys from their countries of origin, carried flags, and wore traditional clothing. These nights are wonderful events of celebration, and community-building!

- **Coffee hours**: A middle school principal holds regular "Coffee with the Principal" hours, both in English and in Spanish, by opening his office for families/caregivers to join him for a time to talk. The principal has also invited community partners to present on key topics, share resources, and answer questions from families/caregivers.

- **Student interviews**: Interviews with SLIFE would also be a great way to get their perspective, voice, choice, and collaboration in the process of building out the program!

- **Bilingual Staff**: Multilingual, multicultural, and ethnically diverse administrators, teachers, counselors, and family liaisons who speak family/caregiver languages are imperative for bridging gaps between schools, families, and community partners. There is a need to recruit, hire, support, and retain diverse staff. Many people from diverse backgrounds may already have connections, understand strengths and needs, and know how to build relationships and community partnerships.

Progress Monitoring and Exiting SLIFE Status

Purpose: The purpose of progress monitoring is to observe, document, interpret, and reflectively act to enhance the growth, achievement, and well-being of SLIFE. Progress monitoring also helps determine the appropriate time to transition a student out of SLIFE status.

Description: Progress monitoring plays a crucial role in assessing whether SLIFE are receiving appropriate services to facilitate their educational progress. Beyond mere data collection, effective progress monitoring involves interpreting and reflecting upon the data, which then informs future SLIFE instruction, services, support, and programming.

At various levels—classroom, school, and district—progress monitoring provides valuable feedback to teachers, schools, and districts. An essential component of progress monitoring in Massachusetts is the use of English Proficiency Benchmarks, which offer indicators of language growth. As a whole, regular data reviews allow educators to assess student progress, identify areas of growth, and make informed decisions. These reviews can occur quarterly or more frequently, with additional check-in points as recommended by those closely involved with the student.

SLIFE is considered a temporary status, and the SLIFE Planning Team plays a crucial role in utilizing data-driven approaches to guide educational pathways for these students. The determination of such pathways should be an inclusive process that actively incorporates the perspectives of SLIFE and their families/caregivers.

It is also essential to note that the needs of SLIFE should be met through appropriate support systems and programming without unnecessarily segregating them from the broader student community. Educational programming for SLIFE should be carried out in the least segregative manner consistent with achieving the program's educational goals.[7]

---

[7] For more detailed information, please refer to pp. 22-23 of the Dear Colleague letter.

Key idea: Exiting students out of SLIFE status

SLIFE is intended as a temporary status. When evaluating whether a student is ready to transition out of SLIFE status, the team may consider various factors, including but not limited to:

- Written observations and recommendations of classroom teachers
- Academic habits and behaviors, as documented by educators working with the student
- Academic grades and classroom progress
- Locally administered academic and linguistic assessments
- Performance on ACCESS for ELLs
- Performance on MCAS

The decision of whether a student should be exited out of SLIFE status should be made holistically by the SLIFE Planning Team, prioritizing the student's overall well-being and academic success. If there is sufficient evidence from various sources indicating the student's ability to succeed in the general English language education program, the district should proceed with removing the SLIFE classification from the State's Student Information Management System (SIMS) and other records it deems appropriate.

Note that exiting SLIFE status is not the same as exiting EL status.

Visit the MA SLIFE Toolkit to access various resources related to progress monitoring.

Sample characteristics of promising progress monitoring services for SLIFE are summarized below. Each school or district may determine which of these strategies may be helpful to its students based on local considerations. Various resources related to this topic appear in the MA SLIFE Toolkit.

- **Establish individualized goals for the student**: Consider the student's linguistic, academic, and social-emotional realms.

- **Take a team-based approach**: The likelihood of positive outcomes for SLIFE are enhanced when administrators, educators, students, and caregivers use multiple data points to make decisions about appropriate services and supports.

- **Collect data from a variety of sources**: SLIFE should have multiple opportunities and multiple ways to demonstrate their learning. Apply Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles and develop avenues for SLIFE to leverage multiple modalities and languages to make learning visible.

- **Collect data at regular intervals:** Document how each student's learning is growing at several points in the academic year.

- **Make decisions based on data**: By collecting and analyzing data and identifying SLIFE progress educators can make informed decisions about instructional strategies, resource allocation, and program enhancements.

- **Monitor language development:** Continue to support the development of home language and literacy and as required for all ELs, and monitor the student's proficiency in English. Use this information to tailor language instruction to meet the students' needs effectively.

- **Monitor academic progress**: Track student progress in subjects such as language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, and identify areas where the students may need additional support.

- **Monitor social-emotional well-being**: Identify what is going well and any challenges SLIFE may face due to migration, cultural adjustment, or other challenging experiences. Provide appropriate support and interventions to promote their mental health and well-being.

- **Monitor cross-cultural understandings**: Understand how well SLIFE are adapting to the school environment and integrating into the school community. Identify what is going well as well as any cultural barriers or challenges SLIFE may be experiencing, and if needed, implement strategies to support cultural adjustment.

- **Review resources and services available to assist the student**: Evaluate strategies for improving curriculum, instructional practices, and routines for SLIFE.

- **Support SLIFE educators**: Offer professional development and coaching on SLIFE-specific topics, including on collaborative conversations and processes to review SLIFE performance data regularly.

- **Monitor exited students**: SLIFE is a temporary status. When students no longer need specialized SLIFE support, continue to monitor areas of strengths and needs, and continue to flexibly adapt as needed to promote former SLIFE's success. (Remember that exiting a student from SLIFE status is not the same as exiting EL status).

Tools: Sample monitoring forms that school districts may customize as they deem appropriate appear in Appendix A: Sample SLIFE Success Portfolio. Sample 1, the "SLIFE Checkpoints" form, follows how students are doing in several categories throughout the year (e.g., academic support, social-emotional support, family/caregiver involvement, future goals). Sample 2, "SLIFE Progress Monitoring Form," directly relates student goals (academic, linguistic, social-emotional) to strategies, progress, and next steps. Sample 3, "Student Success Plan" was released by DESE in 2015 as an example (but not required) plan.

Vignette: The following pages offer a) a snapshot of how two members from the SLIFE Community of Practice use frequent progress monitoring to inform the scheduling and delivery of flexible intervention blocks, and b) a deeper look at how another member of the Community of Practice employs flexible grade-level clusters and frequent, structured progress monitoring.

These examples illustrate strategies for progress monitoring and for meeting SLIFE needs within inclusive learning environments. They are provided for illustrative purposes only and should be adapted to fit local contexts and legal requirements. Schools should exercise caution when gathering student information to ensure compliance with privacy laws and to avoid potentially sensitive topics.

Snapshot: Incorporating intervention and (WIN) blocks into the general schedule

Two members of the SLIFE Community of Practice hosted site visits that showcased innovative approaches to supporting SLIFE. Through careful **progress monitoring**, these schools demonstrated how incorporating targeted intervention or What I Need (WIN) blocks into the regular schedule can accelerate learning and yield significant benefits for SLIFE.

Flexibility through progress monitoring: Both schools emphasized flexibility through progress monitoring. They implemented a data-based approach to scheduling, staff allocation, and adjustment of instruction, allowing for adaptability to meet the diverse needs of SLIFE. With frequent progress monitoring, educators could identify areas where students required additional support and adjust interventions, materials, and instruction accordingly.

Flexibility through scheduling: Both schools adopted a high-leverage approach to intervention, WIN blocks, and scheduling. Educators utilized data to provide personalized support to SLIFE who needed extra assistance in specific areas such as foundational math skills. One school strategically allocated time for these flexible intervention blocks within the regular schedule. The other used progress monitoring to move students in and out of instructional clusters, moving them among groups as their learning progressed in specific areas. Both schools accelerated learning by addressing individual learning needs of students.

Foundational skills *and* grade-appropriate content: Importantly, the educators at both schools recognized the importance of balancing foundational skills with grade-appropriate content. They understood that developing foundational skills is crucial for SLIFE but emphasized that this should not delay their access to challenging material. Instead, students received targeted support through intervention, WIN blocks, and flexible clusters, all the while continuing to be introduced to grade-level content. For both schools, the goal was not just to catch up, but to propel students forward.

Vignette: Progress Monitoring and Inclusion in a Flexible SLIFE Education Model

One Community of Practice member is piloting a **flexible approach** to SLIFE education that **balances targeted support with integration**. The school is organized into 2–3 clusters per grade level, encompassing all students. Each cluster may house different programs, with one dedicated to Newcomers/SLIFE, and special education operating across multiple clusters. Each cluster has a minimum of 4 core classes, with at least 4 out of 6 classes using co-teaching teams. The school day is structured to allow movement between SLIFE and general education classes based on individual progress that is regularly reviewed through progress monitoring.

The **curriculum** employs specialized literacy blocks focusing on the foundational skills SLIFE often need, while "newcomer math" classes use **co-teaching models** that enable flexible grouping within mixed-ability settings. In this co-teaching model, core content and ESL teachers provide subject expertise in both content and language in culturally and linguistically responsive ways, and math and literacy coaches periodically assist with targeted support. The school is also piloting a general education SEI math class that is co-taught and allows sufficient flexibility to also support SLIFE in developing foundational numeracy skills. Other content classes, such as SEI social studies and "specials", integrate SLIFE with other peers and provide occasional push-in support. This **collaborative** approach promotes content accessibility, integrated language development, and SLIFE-tailored strategies.

In addition to the flexible clusters, **integration** is prioritized through other strategies: SLIFE students join the general population for electives, lunch, recess, and school-wide events; mixed-group project-based learning pairs SLIFE with native English speakers; and all students can participate in after-school activities. These approaches are meant to encourage social interaction and provide opportunities for SLIFE to engage with the broader student body.

Progress monitoring is central to this approach. Co-teaching teams use systematic data collection and analysis to document skill development, guiding SLIFE as they move between classes within the cluster based on their progress. Coaches assist in monitoring progress and adjusting instruction accordingly. A Language Assessment Team evaluates student performance across classes and tailors each student's schedule based on this data.

Social-emotional support (SEL) is provided through weekly "Newcomer/SLIFE Meetups" that address SEL needs and community building. Peer mentoring programs pair SLIFE with other students for additional support and integration.

This model aims to provide balanced and targeted support for SLIFE by leveraging careful progress monitoring to personalize learning paths that ultimately lead to integration. With a careful eye toward inclusion, the school utilizes flexible scheduling and staff collaboration to foster content learning, language development, and a sense of community belonging.

Appendix A. Sample SLIFE Success Portfolio

SLIFE Success Portfolio

Purpose: This section provides a sample SLIFE Success Portfolio. It is intended to support idea generation as districts and schools determine the best ways to support SLIFE. Districts and schools have the discretion to decide how to use the information and resources provided here to meet the needs of the students that they serve.

Description: SLIFE Success Portfolio may serve as a systematic structure through which to gather various sources of data, include multiple voices (e.g., administrators, social workers, teachers, students, caregivers), and collaboratively make asset-based decisions to shape the student's educational experience.

This sample SLIFE Success Portfolio is divided into three parts.

Part A: Understanding the Student

- Compile and organize the data gathered in Steps 1–3 (pre-screener, interview, and academic screening). Document pertinent information, learn as much as you can about the student, and include multiple and varied data sources to inform decisions about placement and services.

Part B: Supporting the Student

- Prepare plans for academic and language supports.
- Develop strategies for addressing social-emotional needs.
- Foster connections beyond the classroom.

Part C: Ongoing Progress Monitoring

- Develop a student-centered progress monitoring plan. The portfolio should be considered a living document that is referred to and updated on an ongoing basis through regular progress monitoring.

Directions: As you are completing the 4-Step Process, enter both qualitative and quantitative data collected into the SLIFE Success Portfolio. The portfolio encourages adaptation to local and individual contexts and preferences, and guides the user to:

- Include various data sources (e.g., pre-screener, interview, educational background review, academic screeners, language background, other existing student assessment data, IEP or 504 plans, and more).
- Collaboratively develop an inventory of student interests, skills, and goals.
- Synthesize the data points to collaboratively determine services and supports for the student.
- Offer wraparound support from the school, community, and state.
- Communicate with school teams, students, and caregivers about the plan of action.
- Develop an ongoing and connected SLIFE progress monitoring plan.

SLIFE Success Portfolio Cover Page

Directions: This portfolio cover is intended to include identifying information about the student, and list adults responsible for managing the SLIFE Success Portfolio. A school or district may customize this sample cover page as it deems appropriate or may leverage existing systems or forms to document the information it needs.

SLIFE Success Portfolio	
Student's Name: _____ SASID: _____ Preferred name: _____ Preferred pronouns:_____ Place of birth: _____ Date of birth: _____ Age: _____ Caregiver's preferred language(s): _____ School:_____ Grade:_____ Who is responsible for overseeing this SLIFE Success Portfolio? What team members make up this SLIFE Success Portfolio team?	*Notes*

SLIFE Success Portfolio Part A: Understanding the Student

Sample Language Background Form

Directions: Include information about the student's language background. A school or district may customize this form as it deems appropriate or may leverage existing systems or forms to document the information it needs.

Language Background	
List language backgrounds	**Notes**
Home Language Survey administered on _____ by: _____ Student's spoken language(s): _____ Student's written language(s): _____ Caregivers' spoken language(s): _____ Caregivers' written language(s): _____ Caregivers' preferred language for communicating with the school: _____	
ELD screener results	**Notes**
WIDA	
District/school Communication and Outreach specialists	**Notes**
Our district/school/community resources *For example:* • Family and community liaison: • Interpreter/translator: • Other:	

Step 1: SLIFE Pre-Screener

Directions: This sample form may be used to document information from the SLIFE pre-screener (if administered) in the SLIFE Success Portfolio.

	Criteria for SLIFE classification	Notes
1	The student is an English learner.	☐ Yes ☐ No
2	The student is between 8 and 21 years old.	☐ Yes ☐ No Current age: _____
3	The student enrolled in a school in the U.S. after Grade 2 or exited the U.S. for 6 months or more and did not attend school during this time.	☐ Yes ☐ No Date student entered a school in the U.S.: _____ Periods when the student exited the U.S. for 6 months or more: _____ _____ _____ _____
4	Prior exposure to formal schooling is characterized by one of the following**:** ☐ no formal schooling OR ☐ significant interruptions in formal schooling OR ☐ consistent, but limited formal schooling (e.g., *school days were significantly shorter, or compulsory schooling ended at Grade 6*)	**Based on the initial academic records review,** what number of years and grade levels has the student attended school? _____ _____ ● When school records are incomplete, "Step 2: SLIFE Interview" provides an opportunity to learn more information about previous schooling. ● See also the Educational Background Review chart on the next page—it supports notetaking on each year the student has attended school. Does the student appear to have any gaps in formal education? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Cannot yet determine.
5	**Based on the initial academic records review,** does it appear that, due to limited or interrupted formal education, the student may need accelerated and intensive instruction in foundational numeracy and/or literacy, beyond what an English learner education program usually provides?	The initial registration information and initial academic records preliminarily indicate that the student *may* benefit from additional or enhanced supports or services due to limited or interrupted formal education. ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Cannot yet determine.

Additional notes about transcript review and interview about academic background.

Educational Background Review

Directions: A school or district may draw from the initial academic records review and the SLIFE interview (Step 2), if conducted, to document what it learned about the student's academic background. A school or district may use the chart below[8] to further interview students and/or caregivers to gather missing data if it deems appropriate. *Interviewers should take care to bring a trauma-sensitive lens to these conversations with students and/or caregivers, since gaps in schooling may be a result of particularly traumatic experiences.*

Grade level	When you were X years old…	In what country were you living?	What date range did you attend school? (e.g., Aug–May)	How much time did you spend in school each day? (e.g., 7:30–12)	What languages did the teacher(s) use?	Did you study outside of school that year?	Reasons for gaps in schooling that year (if shared)
	17–18						
	16–17						
	15–16						
	14–15						
	12–13						
	11–12						
	10–11						
	9–10						
	8–9						
	7–8						
	6–7						
	5–6						

---

[8] Adapted from the Mississippi Department of Education's *Supports for English Learner Students with Limited Or Inconsistent/Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE)* (2022).

Additional Existing Student Data

Directions: A school or district may complete the below chart by drawing from the academic screeners (Step 3) (if administered) and the academic records review (if academic records were available for the student). Moreover, a school or district may consider:

- What other student assessment data already exist, if any? (e.g., if the student is coming from another U.S. school, has the student taken any other state academic exams? ACCESS?)
- What other key documents about the student or the student's educational needs exist? For example, does the student have an IEP or 504 plan?

Student assessment data		
Assessment	**Administered by/date**	**Key results (attach)**
Have any **literacy** screeners or assessments been administered in the student's home language?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Have any **numeracy** screeners or assessments been administered in the student's home language?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Does the student have any previous **ACCESS**/Alt ACCESS scores?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Does the student have any previous **MCAS**/Alt MCAS scores?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
Are there any **other** assessment results?	☐ Yes ☐ No	

Information about the Student's Individualized Education Program or 504 Plan (if applicable)

Student Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan	
IEP or 504	**Notes**
Does the student have an IEP or 504 plan?	☐ Yes ☐ No
Who is responsible for overseeing the IEP or 504 plan?	
Who are the IEP or 504 team members?	

Step 2: SLIFE Interview – Sample List of Interview Questions

Directions: If a school or district decides to use a voluntary interview as part of its SLIFE identification process, it may consider the following sample questions when designing its SLIFE interview protocol. Select only the most relevant questions that would fit within a reasonable interview time and yield the information you need. Consider which questions are most appropriate, depending on the student's age and other factors.

After the initial broad list of potential interview questions below, you will find an example of how a district or school might select only the questions they find most relevant for their incoming students**.**

Introductions, Interests, Goals

Create a welcoming climate, make connections, and build rapport with the student.
Solicit student interests and hopes to provide them with school-based experiences that help advance their goals.

Let me tell you a little bit about myself. I am … I would like to get to know you a little so together we can figure out how the school can help you develop your interests and reach your goals. Is that okay with you? Would you like to tell me a little bit about yourself? If I ask any questions you don't feel comfortable answering, you don't have to answer them. If at any point you want to take a break or stop the conversation, just let me know.

1. What do you like to do outside of school? (e.g., sports, music, crafts, art, work, cook, read, play video games, babysit)
2. What are your hopes, or what excites you about coming to this new school?
3. What do you want to do when you leave school?
   a. What kind of job would you like to have?
   b. Would you like to go to college?

Background

Invite the student to share aspects of their background, allowing you to gain insights into the cultures and languages they've encountered. Additionally, this approach can subtly provide clues about their social-emotional well-being.

4. Tell me about your background: Share some details about where you've lived and your experiences growing up.
   a. Where else have you lived?
   b. How long did you live there?
   c. What was it like growing up/living there?
   d. What did you most like about it?
   e. What language(s) did you speak?

Current Living Situation

Learn about the student's current living situation to gather clues about potential needs for other support, such as wraparound services.

5. What is your new home like in Massachusetts?

    a. Who do you live with now?

    b. What languages are spoken at home?

    c. Do the languages change depending on the time or situation?

    d. Do you watch TV? If so, in what languages?

    e. When you talk to your friends, what language(s) do you use?

6. Do you currently work?

    a. What kind of work do you do?

    b. Did you work in your home country? If so, what did you do?

7. There are many great family organizations in Massachusetts. Are you or your family/caregiver currently engaging with any such programs? (e.g., refugee case management, health services, food pantry, assistance with housing, support for individuals who have experienced domestic violence)

Previous Schooling Experiences

Learn about previous schooling experiences to better understand any gaps in formal education.

8. How old were you when you started going to school?

9. How many years total did you attend school? (See Educational Background Review chart on page 50)

10. Where did you go to school last?

    a. What about before that—in what country (countries/U.S. states) have you attended school?

    b. In what language(s) were you taught in school?

11. How did you feel about going to school?

    a. What were some of your favorite things to do at school?

12. What subjects did you study?

    a. What was your favorite?

13. Tell me about a typical day in your favorite class.

    a. Tell me about two things that are different about school here in Massachusetts and in your previous country.

14. What were you like as a student?

    a. If your teachers were asked to describe you as a student, what do you think they would say?

    b. What felt easy or challenging at school?

15. What was the scheduling of your school day like?

    a. How many hours each day?

If the student has difficulty specifying how many hours they attended school each day, could consider asking them -- What time did your school day usually start? What time did your school day usually end?

    b.   How many days a week did you go to school?

    c.   What month did the school year begin and end?

    d.   If you remember, when were school breaks or vacations?

16. Did you regularly attend school?

    a.   Are there times you did not attend school?

    b.   Would you like to tell me what happened?

    c.   How often did you have to miss school?

17. When did you stop going to your last school?

    a.   What was the last grade you attended?

Literacy, Numeracy, and Technology Practices

Learn about previous academic experiences to gather clues about areas of strength and need, and potential academic support.

18. What kinds of materials did you have in school? (e.g., books, notebooks, pencils, individual or shared computers)

19. Do you like to read?

    a.   In what languages do you read?

    b.   Currently, what are some of your favorite books/magazines/websites?

    c.   What other types of reading did you do? (e.g., listen to and read song lyrics, read signs)

20. Do you like to draw?

21. Do you like to or write?

    a.   Do you prefer to write on paper or on the computer?

    b.   In what languages can you write?

22. How do you feel about math?

    a.   What are some examples of how you use math in your life? (e.g., Did you have to count money and count change?)

23. What technology do you use? (e.g., computer, tablet, cell phone, video games)

    a.   In what language(s)?

24. Do you have a computer/cell phone?

    a.   If yes: What types of activities do you like to do on your computer or cell phone?

Planning Introductions and Entry Into the Classroom

Learn about how the student would like to be introduced and supported in the classroom.

25. How would you like to be introduced to your new teachers and classmates? For example, would you like me to share with your teachers and classmates where you are originally from, what languages you speak, how long you've been in the U.S. and Massachusetts, and some of your interests? Anything else?

26. How can your teachers help you feel comfortable in class?

    a. What kinds of strategies have worked in the past, and what might work in this new school setting? (e.g., materials in the home language, use of visuals, preference for sitting closer to the front of the classroom, preferences for partner or small group activities)

    b. What worries do you have about starting in a new school?

27. What would you like your teachers to know about you?

    a. Are there any holidays or observances your teacher should be aware of?

    b. Do you have any dietary restrictions?

    c. Is there anything else you would like to share about yourself?

28. Are you interested in participating in any school clubs or playing a sport after school?

29. What questions do you have right now about coming to this new school?

30. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

SLIFE Interview: Sample District Interview Form

This is a sample interview form. Adapt as needed for your school's and student's context. Images can be helpful visual aids to support students during school intake interviews, helping to bridge language barriers and facilitate clearer communication with students and families/caregivers. The icons below are intended to generate ideas for images that schools may consider incorporating into their interview processes. It's important to note that while 2-dimensional images may be helpful for some students, they may not be as effective for others, so flexibility in approach is key.
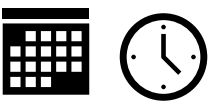
Pre-Interview: Demographic Information	
Consider completing this demographic section prior to the interview with the student/caregiver.	
Date of interview: _____ Time: _____ Location: _____ Student's name: _____SASID: _____ Place of birth: _____ Date of birth: _____ Age: ____ Gender and preferred pronouns: _____ Who is being interviewed? ☐ Student ☐ Caregiver ☐ Other Name of person being interviewed, if not student: _____ Interviewer's name: _____ Title: _____ Interpreter's name (if applicable): _____ In what language is this interview being conducted? _____	*Notes*

SLIFE Interview Sample Form: Personal Information[9]	
Interviewer	**Student or caregiver response**
Let me tell you a little bit about myself. I am … I would like to get to know you a little so together we can figure out how the school can help you develop your interests and reach your goals. Is that okay with you? 1. Would you like to tell me a little bit about yourself? • For example, what do you like to do outside of school? (e.g., sports, music, crafts, art, work, cook, read, play videogames, babysit)	
2. Can you tell me a little about your previous home/country? • How long did you live there? What did you like most about it? What was it like growing up there?	
3. What is your new home like in Massachusetts? • Who do you live with now?	
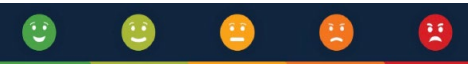
---

[9] Graphics from Illustrated WIDA Guiding Principles, Microsoft stock images, Google searches.

SLIFE Interview Sample Form: Previous Schooling	
Interviewer	**Student or caregiver response**
4. How old were you when you started going to school?	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18
5. How many years total did you attend school?	0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12
6. In what countries have you attended school? In what language(s) were you taught? Have you attended school in any other U.S. states? If yes, which states?	
7. Tell me about two things that are different about school here in Massachusetts and in your previous country.	SAME DIFFERENT = ≠
8. What subjects did you study the last time you were in school?	
9. What was the scheduling of your school day like? ● How many hours each day? *If the student has difficulty specifying how many hours they attended school each day, could consider asking them -- What time did your school day usually start? What time did your school day usually end?* ● How many days a week did you go to school? ● What month did the school year begin and end? ● If you remember, when were school breaks or vacations?	
10. How often did you have to miss school?	

SLIFE Interview Sample Form: Literacy, Numeracy, and Technology Practices	
Interviewer	**Student or caregiver response**
11. Do you like to read? • What are some of your favorite books/magazines/websites now? • In what languages are they?	
12. Do you like to write? • In what languages?	
13. How do you feel about math? • What are some examples of how you use math in your life?	
14. Do you have a computer/cell phone? • If yes: What types of activities do you like to do on your computer or cell phone?	

SLIFE Interview Sample Form: Future Plans/Planning Introductions	
Interviewer	**Student or caregiver response**
15. What do you want to do when you leave school? Go to college? Work?	
16. What excites you about coming to this new school?	
17. What worries you about coming to this new school?	
18. How can your teachers help you feel comfortable in class? • What support would be most helpful to you? • What has worked well in the past?	
19. How would you like to be introduced to your new teachers and classmates?	
20. Do you have any dietary restrictions?	
21. Is there anything else you would like to share about yourself?	

Student Inventory: Interests, Skills, Goals

Directions: Document what you have learned about the student's interests, skills, goals, and concerns from the SLIFE interview (Step 2). Continue to co-generate answers with students and families/ caregivers over time. What else do educators need to know about this student? What are the student's funds of knowledge and future goals?

Inventory: Student's Interests, Skills, and Goals			
Interests	**Skills**	**Goals**	**Student's Concerns**

SLIFE Success Portfolio Part B: Supporting the Student

Directions: As you reflect on all the information you have learned about the student in Part A of the portfolio, and as you feel ready to determine appropriate supports for the student, consider:

Guiding Prompts	Notes

• Does the SLIFE Success Portfolio team have all the necessary or available information to make determinations about initial supports for the student?
  – If not, what information is missing?
  – How can the missing information be obtained?	

• Where will the portfolio information be stored?	
• Who will have access to the portfolio information? – Will some school/district employees have access only to specific parts of the portfolio?	
• How will the portfolio be shared with individuals authorized to access it?	
• What internal feedback loops (e.g., among teachers, administrators, social workers) can be put in place to keep the portfolio updated and reflective of the student's current strengths and needs?	
• Additional considerations: …	

Student Academic Support Plan

Directions: As your school or district begins to draft the academic support plan, you may consider:

Guiding Prompts	Notes
• How is the academic support plan designed to build on student strengths, goals, and interests?	
• Would this student benefit from additional supports, services or flexibilities? (e.g., afterschool, Saturday, or summer programs; work study opportunities; credit recovery assistance; pass-fail classes)	
• Does the plan consider the need for collaboration among the student's teachers (e.g., language, content, special education)?	
• Additional considerations:	

A school or district may adapt this form as it deems appropriate to sketch out potential additional supports for students identified as SLIFE or to document other relevant information about the student's education.

Student Academic Placement Plan		
	Options	**Notes**
School placement	• Home school • Other: _____	
English language education program	☐ Dual language ☐ Sheltered English immersion ☐ Transitional bilingual education ☐ Newcomer ☐ SLIFE ☐ Other_____	

Student Academic Placement Plan		
	Options	**Notes**
Academic content placement	Grade: _____ Content areas and settings: _____ _____ _____ _____	
Additional academic supports and interventions	What type of support will the student receive? ☐ Para in-class support (e.g., language, content) ☐ Literacy support ☐ Math support ☐ Science support ☐ Tutoring ☐ Study skills ☐ Life skills ☐ Social-emotional learning ☐ After school ☐ Summer program ☐ Student has IEP or 504 plan that will be implemented ☐ Other: _____	
High school graduation pathways	Potential choices for graduation pathways: _____ _____	
Benchmarks (ELD and academic)	• ACCESS • MCAS ELA, math, science • Local assessments • Other:_____	
Other	_____ _____ _____	

Wraparound Support

Directions: Promoting engagement and providing adequate support to students identified as SLIFE often includes careful consideration of support not only for their academic development but also their social-emotional well-being. Your district or school may adapt this form to plan wraparound support for SLIFE or may use existing forms or resources it has to document such support.

Student and Caregiver Connections to Wraparound Support	
Consider: ☐ Mental health and wellness support ☐ Nutrition ☐ Vaccinations and medical support (as appropriate) ☐ School supplies (e.g., pencils, paper, Chromebooks, dictionaries, backpacks) ☐ Services for families (e.g., language and culture, housing, food, job assistance) ☐ Connections and coordination with government/community organizations that may be able to provide support to the student/caregivers ☐ Home visits (if appropriate) ☐ Other: _____ _____ _____	Notes

Student Orientation Plan

Directions: Schools and districts may develop an orientation process that introduces, welcomes, and supports students identified as SLIFE and families/caregivers entering the school. Keep in mind that the first day of school may not necessarily occur at the beginning of the year, and a plan should be established for supportive orientations no matter when the students enroll. The school-specific orientation plan may include, for example:

Orientation Plan Ideas	Notes
Point person: A point person at the school who will assist SLIFE and their family/caregivers with orientation to the school's routines and procedures.	Point person:
Liaison/interpreter: Family liaisons or interpreters for students and caregivers on the first day(s) of school.	Cultural/linguistic supports:
Orientation system: An orientation system of one or more days to help students and families/ caregivers feel welcome and supported. One SLIFE Community of Practice member extends the orientation to monthly meetings for families/caregivers.	Orientation agenda:
Tour: Students and families are given a tour of the school in their home language.	School tour plan:
Welcome committee: A student welcome committee composed of student leaders and teachers who may support SLIFE in their first weeks of school.	Welcome committee:
Buddy system: A student buddy system with peers or classmates who can show SLIFE around and help them adjust to the daily routines.	Student buddy:
Other:	

Communication, Coordination, and Collaboration Plan

Directions: Use the prompts in this section to craft a plan for how you will communicate, coordinate, and collaborate with stakeholders supporting the student. When preparing a communication, coordination, and collaboration plan, please take into account confidentiality or privacy limitations in terms of which information may be shared with which stakeholders.
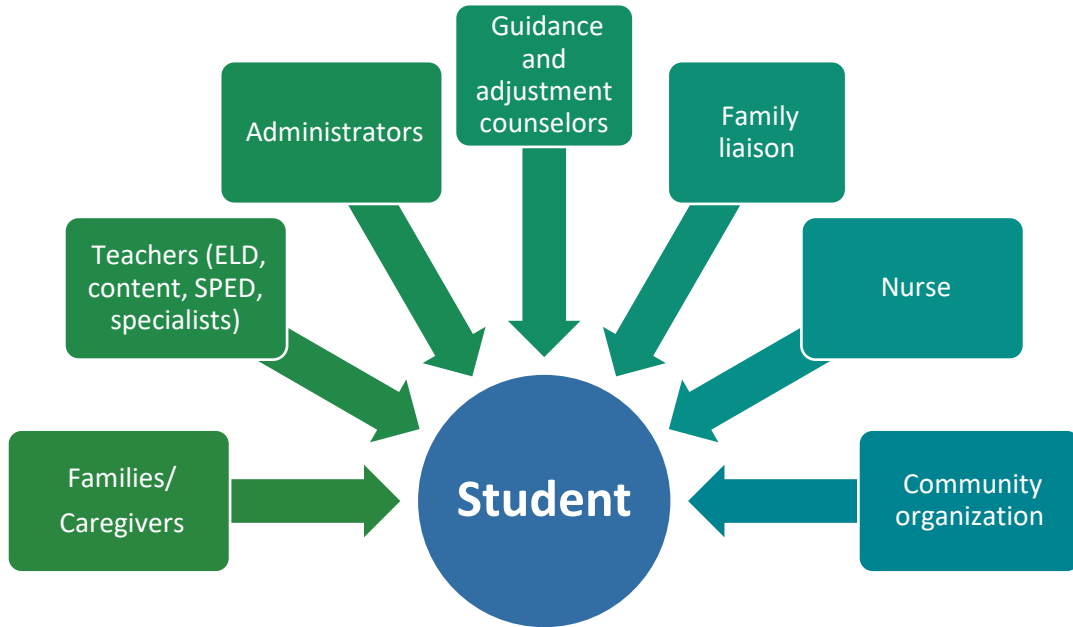
Guiding Prompts	Notes
Transmission: Who is responsible for sharing which accurate and timely pieces of information with whom? Through what channels? How often?	
Dialogue: When and how will portfolio quantitative and qualitative data inform dialogue among relevant stakeholder groups?	
Coordination and collaboration: How will student support be coordinated among the various parties, and how might collaboration work?	
Feedback loops: What external feedback loops (e.g., with families and caretakers, community organizations) need to be in place to support the students' linguistic, academic, and social-emotional well-being and success?	
Support: How will the portfolio information be used to support the student and caregivers?	
Additional considerations:	

SLIFE Success Portfolio Part C: Ongoing Progress Monitoring

This section presents sample progress monitoring forms designed to track and assess various aspects of SLIFE development and achievement that schools or districts may use. Schools and districts may also use existing systems that they have to conduct ongoing progress monitoring.

Sample 1: SLIFE Support Checkpoints

Directions: Schools and districts may adapt this sample form to monitor student support and involvement in several areas.

Support Checkpoints	1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	3rd Quarter	4th Quarter
Academic Supports				
Afterschool support, tutoring, or enrichment				
Study skills				
Attendance				
Behavior				
Other:				
Social-Emotional Supports				
Counseling				
Groups				
Support liaisons/teams				
Other:				
Extracurricular Activities				
Participation in extracurricular activities				
Community service				
Other:				
Family/Caregiver Involvement				
Meetings with caregivers				
Home visits (if any)				
Communication with community agencies (if any)				
Other:				
Future Goals				
Discussion: future plans				
Discussions: progress, goals, graduation				
Other:				

Sample 2: SLIFE Progress Monitoring Form

Directions: This is a sample form promotes monitoring of strategies and progress in relation to various student goals. Schools or districts may adapt this sample form or utilize existing systems or forms for progress monitoring in their schools.

Student's name: Pronouns:		DoB:	Age:	Grade:	Home language(s):

Academic strengths: ● ● ●	Interests: ● ● ●

Goal (academic, social-emotional, etc.)		**Strategy or Action Steps**	**Progress Monitoring**: Did student make progress/meet goals?		**Next Steps**		
Date	Notes:	● ● ● ●	Date:	Asset-based notes:	Date:	☐ Met Goal ☐ Continue ☐ Modify	Notes:
		● ● ● ●				☐ Met Goal ☐ Continue ☐ Modify	
		● ● ● ●				☐ Met Goal ☐ Continue ☐ Modify	
		● ● ● ●				☐ Met Goal ☐ Continue ☐ Modify	
Notes:							

SLIFE Progress Monitoring chart with thanks to Linda Flueckiger.

Sample 3: SLIFE Sample Student Success Plan

Directions: Schools or districts may adapt this sample SLIFE Success Plan (DESE, 2015) or use their existing systems or forms as they deem appropriate. The use of this plan is not required, but schools or districts may find it helpful.

<div align="center">

SLIFE Student Success Plan 20XX–20XX

XXX Public Schools XXX Elementary/Middle/High School

</div>

Last name: _____ First name: _____

Birth date: _____ SASID: _____Grade: _____

Country of origin: _____

Language(s): Oral: _____ Written: _____ Student is SLIFE: Yes / No

| **Type of English Learner Education program:**

 ☐ SEI ☐ TBE

 ☐ TWI ☐ Newcomer

 ☐ ESL class

 ☐ Pull-out ☐ Push-in

 ☐ _____ periods of ESL[1]

 ☐ Other _____ | ☐ SEI Content areas:

 _____

 _____

 _____

 _____

 _____ | **Type of support:** ☐ para in-class support (circle: SPED, language, content)

 ☐ Title I Reading

 ☐ Title I Math

 ☐ Literacy Support

 ☐ Tutoring ☐ Math

 ☐ Title III

 ☐ Student has IEP or 504 plan

 ☐ Other:
 _____ |

Educator overseeing this plan: _____ SSP team members: _____

Attachments: ☐ Intake assessments ☐ Home language surveys ☐ IEP or 504 plans (if applicable)

☐ MCAS ☐ ACCESS/Alt ACCESS

☐ Local assessments ☐ Teacher input ☐ Other

Student created self-description and goals:

Notes: *What do we need to know about this student? What are the student's funds of knowledge, current learning goals? How is the student adjusting to school, what interests or motivates the student, etc.?*

ELP Benchmarks: Prior ACCESS/Alt ACCESS* level and year⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽

Difficulty Index (ACCESS only) ⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽ ACCESS/Alt ACCESS* target (ACCESS only) ⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽

*Alt ACCESS takers will have demonstrated progress if they increase proficiency level in one or more subdomains of the Alt ACCESS. They will not receive a Difficulty Index or ACCESS target, as both are calculated only for ACCESS.

Quick peek:

MCAS Math score and year administered ⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽

MCAS ELA score and year administered ⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽

MCAS Science score and year administered⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽⎽

Local assessments/measures and when given:

School Interventions: Interventions for ELs may include tiered systems of support—small group instruction, literacy instruction, etc. ESL is *not* an intervention. Some ELs may also have IEP or Section 504 plans that must be implemented by the school or district, and this document is not intended and does not replace them.

Subject	Specific Goals	Intervention/ Strategies	Intervention Monitoring Date	Monitoring Status	
				Sufficient Progress	Comments
				☐	
				☐	
				☐	
				☐	
				☐	
				☐	
				☐	
				☐	
				☐	

Intervention Status	☐ **Student is not progressing in a timely manner.** Intervention/strategies to be revised: _____ **Date:** _____
	☐ **Student is making some progress with:** _____ **intervention**/strategies. ☐ **Continue** with plan. **Date:** _____
	☐ **Student has mastered and completed interventions.** Student will no longer receive interventions/strategies. **Date:** _____

Parent Strategies: (Steps/strategies that the student's parents or guardians may take to help the student improve his/her skills)	
Parent Information	Parent has been informed of the content of the Student Success Plan after each monitoring update visit in a language they can understand via: ☐ E-mail ☐ Mail ☐ Conference **Date:** _____ ☐ E-mail ☐ Mail ☐ Conference **Date:** _____ ☐ E-mail ☐ Mail ☐ Conference **Date:** _____

Appendix B. Additional Resources for Step 3, Academic Screening

The sample processes below offer ideas to support local decision making about each district's approach to literacy and numeracy screeners.

a. Adopt, Adapt, or Develop Local Literacy and Numeracy Screening Resources

The action steps and prompts below support a local decision-making process where each district concludes whether it would be in their students' best interest for the district to adopt, adapt, or develop its own academic screeners and resources.

Action Step	Guiding Questions
1. **What is the need?** Clarify purpose and intended outcomes of adding new academic screeners and resources.	• **Purpose**: What is the purpose of adding new academic screeners? • **Outcome:** What is the intended outcome of administering these additional screeners? • **New information:** How will these screeners be different from what the district already has in place? What new information will the new screeners add? • **Use:** How will the new information be used?
2. **How would the new academic screeners affect broader SLIFE programming?** Determine how the new screeners and their results would fit into the broader SLIFE intake, support, instruction, and programming processes.	• **Academic screeners and the bigger picture of SLIFE programming**: How do academic screeners currently interact with other aspects of SLIFE programming? When the district updates its screening resources, what will need to change, if anything? For example, how will screener results affect intake, support, programming, and teaching and learning processes?

Action Step	Guiding Questions
3. **What would it take for the district to develop its own academic screening resources?** Determine feasibility of in-district development of academic screeners and related resources.	• **Staff**: Does the district have staff with the capacity and expertise to develop academic screeners for the district's purposes? What training would need to be built into the design process? • **Resources**: What resources would the development of the screeners take? Is the district committed to investing the resources to support this? (e.g., materials, staffing, training) • **Implementation**: What would the operationalization of the screeners take? Is the district committed to investing the resources to support this? (e.g., materials, staffing, training)
4. **What is the district decision?** Decide if the district will adopt, adapt, or create its own screeners and related resources.	• Is it better for the district to develop in-house academic screeners or to use something that already exists? How so?

The choice to a) adopt, b) adapt, or c) create in-district academic screeners and related resources leads to different pathways. When districts determine they have the necessary in-house technical expertise and capacity to develop their own screening resources, consult the "Sample Process for In-District Development of Academic Screening Resources" below.

b. Sample Process for In-District Development of Academic Screening Resources

Screener Considerations	Guiding Questions and Suggestions
	Design with content in mind: *What are the most important data points the academic screener(s) will collect and produce?*
Purpose	• Refine purpose of academic screener (e.g., determine skill level, make decisions about support or services, create a baseline for progress monitoring, inform teaching and learning). • Develop clarity around what is in and out of scope for this screening.
Student candidates	• Who are the intended candidates for administration of this screener? (e.g., what grade and age range?)
Information to be produced	• What questions would you like the academic screener to answer? • How will the information produced "talk to" other pieces of data? (e.g., WIDA screener)
Constructs	• What specific literacy and numeracy skills, practices, and knowledge will be gathered though this screener?
Stop points	• Does the student need to take the whole academic screener, or should it be stopped at a certain performance point?
Responsive, inclusive, asset-based, and culturally and linguistically responsive approaches	• **Adapt academic screeners to be culturally and linguistically responsive** by working with cultural brokers, translators, and proficient speakers of other languages. • **Languages**: In what languages will academic screeners be developed? • **Responsiveness** for social-emotional variability and trauma backgrounds. • **Accessibility:** Offer multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression. • **Bias** check (e.g., do items represent subgroups equitably? Are graphics represented in a way that is generally accepted as standard or is accessible to students?)

Screener Considerations	Guiding Questions and Suggestions
Design with administration in mind: *How, where, and when will the academic screener be administered?*	
Modes for academic screener(s)	• What modes and formats will be available for the academic screener? (e.g., on paper, virtual, oral) • What resources are required for development in specific formats? (e.g., technology)
Length of screener	• What is the desired length of the academic screener, in terms of number of items and time spent by student?
Scheduling	• When will the academic screener be administered? (e.g., upon enrollment, beginning of year, every 6 months)
Location	• Where will the academic screener be administered—in what settings? (e.g., district or school level, registration office, newcomer center, etc.) What will be needed to prepare the space and materials for assessment?
Proctors	• Who will administer the academic screener? What are the qualifications for administration?
Training	• What training in academic screener administration will be offered, and how often?
Candidate grouping	• Will the academic screener be administered individually or in small or large groups?
Candidate preparation	• How will student screener candidates (and caretakers) be prepared to take the academic screener?
Design with data analysis and interpretation in mind: *How will data collected from the academic screener be analyzed and interpreted?*	
How to interpret?	• How will findings be interpreted and documented?
Who will interpret?	• Who will interpret the results? What are the required competencies for interpretation?
Training	• What types of training will be necessary and how often does training need to be offered?
Triangulation of data	• How will screener data be considered in relation to other data sources about student strengths and needs?
Data management	• How will data be stored, managed, and shared?

Screener Considerations	Guiding Questions and Suggestions
Design with data-informed decision making in mind: *How will the academic screener results be used?*	
Output format of results	• How will results be made available for communication with internal and external stakeholders and decision making? When considering this question, please note that privacy and confidentiality may limit the information that can be shared with certain stakeholders.
Communication of results	• How will documentation and communication happen among stakeholders in relation to the screener results? (e.g., students, families, administrators, content and language teachers, special education specialists) • What data will you share (raw data, or interpretation/analysis of data, or both)?
Data-informed decisions	• Along with other data, how will screener results inform decisions about support, teaching, and learning?
Student monitoring	• How will student progress be monitored after the initial academic screener? How often? By whom?
Build quality and confidence into the screener: *How can the district develop confidence that the screener can be fairly and appropriately used to inform decision making (e.g., services)?*	
Pilot and revise	• Conduct piloting cycles to optimize all aspects of the screener (e.g., item design, eliminate bias, improve administration).
Improve	• Set up monitoring and continuing improvement cycles for the quality of the academic screener.

Appendix C. Acknowledgments

This guidance was developed in partnership with the Region 1 Comprehensive Center Network (R1CC) for the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

The R1CC and the Department wish to acknowledge the discussions, contributions, and participation of educators from over 50 Massachusetts districts who are members of the Massachusetts SLIFE Community of Practice.

Additional Contributors

- Linda Flueckiger, Coordinator of Tiered Interventions and Support, Waltham Public Schools
- David LeBlanc, Wraparound Middle School Program Coordinator, Waltham Partnership for Youth

Suggested citation: Kray, F. M. (2024). *Students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE): Guidance for SLIFE identification, services, and support*. Region 1 Comprehensive Center Network for the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.