**DESE SLIFE Identification, Services, and Support**

**SLIFE District Self-Assessment**

**Webinar Transcript**

**Slide 1:**

Welcome and thank you for joining us for this introductory webinar on the SLIFE District Self-Assessment.

**Slide 2:**

We encourage you to utilize the DESE SLIFE resources, including the Guidance Document and Toolkit. These materials are accessible via the link provided in the PDF version of this slide deck presentation. https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/slife/default.html

This self-assessment tool was created in alignment with the DESE SLIFE Guidance Document. Both the process steps and terminology are drawn directly from the Guidance Document. In this webinar, I will provide a detailed walkthrough of how to complete the self-assessment with your district team.

**Slide 3:**

You’ll find the content organized in sections for flexible viewing—either individually or as a team, with the option to pause as needed. We’ll begin with a concise overview of the SLIFE District Self-Assessment’s background and purpose. Next, I’ll guide you step-by-step through the self-assessment process, from assembling your team to understanding each required indicator. We’ll then examine the self-reflection checklist and explore practical resources for action planning. This initial segment focuses on how to effectively use the tool and prepares you for next steps in meeting the needs of SLIFE. Part 2 will address further implementation strategies.

**Slide 4:**

In Part 2, we will examine each step of the self-assessment process in greater detail. Please have your DESE SLIFE Guidance Document available for reference, as we will follow the document closely. Special emphasis will be placed on Step 4, given its complexity. We will also provide a thorough explanation of the self-reflection checklist and discuss strategies for your team to use it effectively. The final section will focus on developing a concrete action plan to support SLIFE in your district.

**Slide 5:**

I'll begin by offering a brief introduction to the SLIFE District Self-Assessment’s background and purpose.

**Slide 6:**

Each year, Massachusetts schools serve a growing number of English learners (ELs) who have experienced limited or interrupted formal education—referred to as SLIFE. 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, the guidance and resources provided by DESE aim to help districts identify additional supports these students may need beyond standard English learner education services. The Department’s mission is to equip districts and educators with effective tools and strategies to enhance educational outcomes for SLIFE, in line with the agency’s [Educational Vision](https://www.doe.mass.edu/commissioner/vision/).

**Slide 7:**

The Office of Language Acquisition has taken a three-pronged approach to supporting schools and districts with identifying and meeting the needs of SLIFE: 1) research, 2) a community of practice, and 3) guidance and tool development.

**Slide 8:**

First – Research - In 2024, the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®), an independent third-party research organization, conducted this study for DESE to document field-based promising practices for supporting SLIFE across Massachusetts. Rather than prescribing solutions, this study aimed to learn from practitioners actively developing and implementing SLIFE support strategies. The DESE website provides links to this report and executive summary, as well as associated vignettes.

**Slide 9:**

Second The Massachusetts SLIFE Community of Practice (CoP) has provided an ongoing space for educators from more than 50 districts to collaborate, share best practices, and engage in professional learning about meeting the needs of SLIFE.

**Slide 10:**

And third – guidance and tool development – including this SLIFE District Self-Assessment and webinar. The Guidance Document and related resources can all be found on the DESE website

**Slide 11:**

The SLIFE District Self-Assessment is designed to help Massachusetts school districts systematically evaluate their SLIFE services and programs, ensuring alignment with the 2024 DESE SLIFE guidance.

Its primary goals are to support data-driven decisions for program enhancement, guide the effective allocation of resources, and enable districts to develop comprehensive action plans tailored to the academic, linguistic, and social-emotional needs of SLIFE.

This framework is suitable both for districts with established SLIFE programs and for those preparing for potential changes in student demographics.

**Slide 12:**

The SLIFE District Self-Assessment is directly aligned with the Massachusetts 2024 SLIFE guidance and is structured to help districts systematically identify both strengths and gaps within their current systems and practices for supporting SLIFE. It prompts individual staff or district teams to review and evaluate existing policies, procedures, and instructional approaches related to SLIFE. The final section of the tool guides users in creating a detailed, actionable plan for addressing identified needs and enhancing support for SLIFE.

**Slide 13:**

The SLIFE District Self-Assessment tool is available as a Word document and pdf. There is also a Google Sheets version available if that is the district preference.

District teams review and score their implementation of SLIFE policies, programs, and practices using the tool. Teams can choose to have each member complete the tool individually and then discuss results to reach a consensus, or they may complete the assessment collaboratively from the start.

If using the Google Sheets version, teams should copy and save it to a district folder. The online tool auto-calculates scores, whereas the Word and pdf versions require manual calculations.

This assessment process can be completed in a single session or divided into steps, allowing time for reflection before creating an action plan.

**Slide 14:**

Assembling the Team

**Slide 15:**

Districts should assemble a targeted team of stakeholders with direct experience and knowledge of SLIFE programs, policies, and student needs within the district. The team should be empowered to assess existing SLIFE systems and to provide recommendations for change. Team composition will vary by district, depending on factors such as district size, available resources, and the specific characteristics of the SLIFE population served. When selecting team members, prioritize individuals deeply familiar with current SLIFE practices, strengths, and challenges, as well as those responsible for developing and enacting the resulting action plan.

It is essential to include members with demonstrated SLIFE expertise.

**Slide 16:**

Consider including the following key stakeholders on your team: central office administrators, building principals, instructional coaches, SLIFE program coordinators, ESL and general education teachers, special educators, counselors, and support staff who work directly with SLIFE. Whenever possible, also involve family representatives and student voices to ensure well-rounded feedback and planning.

**Slide 17:**

Elements of the Tool

**Slide 18:**

As I mentioned earlier, the SLIFE District Self-Assessment was created directly based on the DESE SLIFE Guidance document. Every step and all terminology within the tool are aligned with those outlined in the Guidance, ensuring full consistency throughout.

**Slide 19:**

The SLIFE District Self-Assessment is provided as a PDF or Word version as well as a Google Sheets version; districts may select whichever format best meets their needs. For this webinar, the Word version will be used for demonstration, allowing everyone to review the tool’s structure and features. The Google Sheets version offers the same content but will automatically calculate scores.

To use the PDF or Word version, distribute a copy to each team member. If your team prefers typing, the team may want to use the Word version. Team members may first complete the assessment individually, scoring each item, and then discuss as a group to reach consensus on every item.

Alternatively, the team may complete a single form together, discussing and agreeing on each response as a group. Choose the procedure that aligns best with your team’s workflow.

**Slide 20:**

The initial two pages of the SLIFE District Self-Assessment contain background information and instructions for completing the assessment.

**Slide 21:**

For reference, we have provided direct links to the DESE SLIFE Guidance document and DESE SLIFE Toolkit. As your team completes the self-assessment, it is recommended to keep the guidance document accessible—this will allow you to verify definitions, clarify procedures, and ensure that every response accurately reflects the criteria outlined in each step.

**Step 22:**

You will find the scoring criteria detailed in the instructions section

**Step 23:**

And explicitly identified within each table of the self-assessment. Next, we will examine these scoring guidelines in greater detail.

**Step 24:**

For scoring, we will use the same rubric as the DESE MTSS Self-Assessment. Each indicator in the tool should be rated on a scale from 1 to 4, where: [Read slide]

**Slide 25:**

Now, let’s examine the structure of the tool in detail. At this time, please pause the video and review each page of the assessment thoroughly.

Once you have completed your review, return to the screen and press play to continue.

**Slide 26:**

Now that you've thoroughly reviewed the assessment tool, let's proceed with scoring. Please turn to Step 1 to begin evaluating each indicator according to the rubric.

**Slide 27:**

As you progress through the assessment, remember that Steps 1 through 3 are designed specifically to create a holistic, strengths-based understanding of the individual student. In Step 1, an initial pre-screener is conducted during enrollment to quickly identify students with possible interruptions in their formal education and to determine if further, more detailed screening is needed.

**Slide 28:**

Each step of the assessment features specific indicators that define full and systematic implementation of a SLIFE Identification, Services, and Support program. Adjacent columns allow you to record your score for each indicator by selecting the box that matches your rating on the 1–4 scale.

At the end of each table, you’ll find a designated area to calculate and enter the average score for all indicators within that section.

**Slide 29:**

In Step 1, you’ll notice there are five clearly defined indicators, each accompanied by specific bullet points detailing the key criteria for implementation. As you review each indicator, refer to these bullet points to guide your scoring decisions.

**Slide 30:**

Remember, the scoring system uses a 1–4 scale. Please refer to the descriptions provided earlier to select the box that best reflects your evaluation for each indicator.

**Slide 31:**

In the far right-hand column, you can document evidence supporting your score or add notes specific to your district, such as relevant data or observations. If working in a digital format, you may also insert links to frequently used or recommended resources. Additionally, at the bottom of each Step’s table, there is space provided for supplementary notes.

**Slide 32:**

Self-Check

**Slide 33:**

Once you have finished scoring all indicators, review the guiding questions - provided in the Self-Check section. Use these questions to help your team identify specific goals or actionable next steps based on your evaluation results.

**Slide 34:**

At the conclusion of the self-check process, the tool includes a dedicated section for outlining an action plan. In part two of the training, we will explore how to use this section in depth, but for now, note that it offers a structured space to record targeted next steps informed by your assessment results.

**Slide 35:**

For action planning, the team selects a single priority indicator to focus on and defines a corresponding problem of practice. Action steps are organized into three categories: Do now (immediate actions), Do soon (short-term follow-ups), and Do later (long-term initiatives). The template prompts the team to set a clear, achievable goal, list specific resources required, and assign a target completion date for each step. Finally, there is a section to specify what measurable outcome will indicate that the goal has been successfully accomplished.

**Slide 36:**

This section provides clear distinctions for “Do soon” (near-term actions) and

**Slide 37:**

And this section “Do later” (long-term objectives). Example entries are included to guide your planning, but your team should customize each action step based on your specific priorities and context.

**Slide 38:**

This tool is designed to facilitate focused, productive discussions among team members about their current systems supporting SLIFE. Whether your district is in the early stages of developing a program or has established structures in place, this tool helps teams set practical, clearly defined goals for program improvement.

**Slide 39:**

With the overview of the tool complete, our next step is to examine each core element and review the specific indicators for systematic and comprehensive implementation of SLIFE programs. Please pause the video at this point, take a short break if needed, and return prepared to reference the guidance document for a detailed walkthrough.

**Slide 40:**

Welcome back for Part 2.

**Slide 41:**

Please ensure you have the DESE SLIFE guidance document available, as you will need to reference it in the next section.

**Slide 42:**

Before we move into Part 2, let’s briefly recap what you’ve completed so far. In Part 1, you received an introduction to the SLIFE District Self-Assessment, including its background and overall purpose. You learned how to assemble your team, began the process for conducting the self-assessment, and reviewed the indicators for each step in the tool. You also explored the self-check reflection and learned how to use resources for developing a tailored action plan. This foundational work was designed to help you understand how to navigate the tool and set the stage for your district’s efforts to better serve SLIFE. With these steps complete, you are now ready to proceed to Part 2.

**Slide 43:**

In Part 2, we will systematically examine each step of the SLIFE District Self-Assessment in greater depth. Please keep your DESE SLIFE guidance document accessible, as it will be essential for following the detailed discussion of each phase. Special emphasis will be placed on Step 4, due to its complexity and importance. We will also provide specific instructions on completing the self-check reflection and guide your team through constructing a targeted action plan tailored to your district’s SLIFE program needs. Our aim is to equip your team with clear strategies for effective and sustainable program improvement.

**Slide 44:**

This overview introduces the four-step process for identifying, supporting, and monitoring SLIFE. Steps 1 through 3 focus on collecting comprehensive and diverse data to inform the individualized planning process in Step 4. Step 4 is crucial, as it guides the creation of personalized placement decisions, targeted services, and ongoing progress monitoring for each SLIFE.

As you reference the guidance document, you will notice that it includes specific sample resources and templates aligned to each step, helping your district implement each phase effectively.

**Slide 45:**

We will now begin to explore Steps 1 through 3.

**Slide 46:**

It is essential to develop a holistic, strengths-based understanding of each student. That is what staff should keep in mind as the key idea or premise of the intake process.

**Slide 47:**

Step 1 of the process, as outlined in the guidance document, focuses specifically on the intake procedure. Here, districts administer a brief pre-screener at the time of enrollment to identify students who may have experienced limited or interrupted formal education. If the pre-screener indicates potential gaps, additional screening is conducted to determine whether a student qualifies for SLIFE services. This systematic approach ensures that all relevant educational background data is collected early, facilitating accurate SLIFE identification and placement.

**Slide 48:**

When completing the self-assessment, focus on the indicators for the administration of the Pre-Screener.

* Indicator 1: “We have a Pre-Screener in place that is a consistent part of the registration process for all newly arrived students 8 years of age and older.” Accurately rate your district—Is the Pre-Screener fully implemented, partially in place, or not yet established? In the notes section, include either a direct link to your district’s SLIFE Pre-Screener or a brief explanation justifying your chosen rating.
* Indicator 2: “All relevant staff are adequately trained on the SLIFE Pre-Screener, its purpose, and administration procedures.” Evaluate whether staff are fully trained, in the process of being trained, or require further training. Use the evidence/notes section to document specific training activities, staff rosters, or areas needing improvement.

Systematically proceed through each indicator, referencing the detailed criteria that define a comprehensive system. Turn to Page 13 of the guidance document for expanded descriptions and examples. Review the sample Pre-Screener provided—does your district utilize this tool, or could it be adapted for local use?

Additionally, examine the two vignettes in Part 1 of the guidance document. Consider how these scenarios can be applied to inform and strengthen your district’s staff training on effective Pre-Screener implementation.

**Slide 49:**

Step 2 centers on conducting structured interviews to collect detailed information about the student’s prior educational experiences, literacy in first and additional languages, and any gaps or interruptions in formal schooling. Educators ask targeted questions regarding the student’s academic history, proficiency in reading and writing, language exposure, and circumstances surrounding any interruptions in education. The data gathered during these interviews provide critical insights for accurately determining SLIFE classification and tailoring instructional supports to meet each student’s needs.

**Slide 50:**

Step 2 includes six clearly defined indicators for the SLIFE Structured Interview process. Throughout the tool, practical resources are embedded, such as sample interview questions, which staff can use to develop a consistent interview protocol.

Evaluate your district’s approach: Are staff members creating a welcoming, supportive environment for students during the interviews? Are these interviews conducted in a manner that is both culturally and linguistically responsive?

As you assess each indicator, use them as a structured checklist for developing or refining your district’s protocols and training agendas if a system is not yet established. These indicators can guide the logistical planning and step-by-step development of effective interview procedures.

The guidance document also recommends collaborating with cultural brokers—both within and beyond the district—to facilitate interviews. These partnerships can enhance communication and ensure that interviews accurately capture each student’s educational background and needs.

**Slide 51:**

Step 3 Focuses on administering standardized academic screeners to evaluate a student’s current levels of literacy and mathematics proficiency. These assessments are designed to identify specific strengths and areas for growth, and their results inform both course placement and the customization of instructional supports. Whenever feasible, screeners should be provided in the student’s home language to ensure valid and reliable results. The primary objective is to capture the student’s foundational skills, rather than assign a grade level, thereby guiding effective instructional planning and resource allocation.

**Slide 52:**

Before proceeding, verify whether your district employs standardized screeners specifically for literacy and mathematics, and determine if these assessments are available in students’ home languages. Step 3 is structured around five key indicators, each outlining essential requirements for the screening process. These indicators describe how to select appropriate assessments, ensure linguistic accessibility, and interpret results to inform instructional planning. Detailed descriptions and supplemental resources for each indicator are provided within the guidance document.

**Slide 53:**

Step 4

**Slide 54:**

Step 4 builds upon the foundation established in the first three steps, guiding districts to develop SLIFE Services and Support Plans. By leveraging comprehensive data—gathered through a pre-screener, interviews, standardized academic screeners, and collaborative input—districts create individualized plans that determine appropriate placement, targeted services, and ongoing progress monitoring for each student.

It is essential that educational programming for SLIFE occurs in the least restrictive setting possible while still meeting the student’s learning needs. The primary goal is to accelerate academic growth and integrate SLIFE into the broader school community, ensuring access to grade-level content with their peers.

* SLIFE, like all English Learners (ELs), should transition out of specialized programs as soon as they have met the program’s objectives; prolonging placement should be avoided.
* Services should be tailored to each student’s academic background, language proficiency, and social-emotional needs, with a clear pathway for integration into general education.
* The specific design of SLIFE services may vary by district and school context, reflecting both local resources and the unique characteristics of the student population.

These recommendations are intended to help districts craft effective, student-centered approaches that support SLIFE in achieving academic success and full participation in school life.

**Slide 55:**

Step 4

Focuses on creating an individualized support plan for SLIFE students based on the information gathered in earlier steps. This plan may include academic and linguistic support, social-emotional support, family and community connections, and progress monitoring and exiting SLIFE status.

Step 4 centers on developing a detailed, individualized Services and Support Plan for each SLIFE, informed by comprehensive data collected in prior steps. This plan explicitly outlines academic and linguistic support, social-emotional support, family and community connections, and progress monitoring and exiting SLIFE status.

**Slide 56:**

At this stage, use the comprehensive data collected to create a tailored SLIFE Services and Support Plan for the student. Step 4 encompasses four specific indicators,

**Slide 57:**

And then it has an additional four focal points: academic and linguistic support, social-emotional support, family and community engagement, and procedures for progress monitoring and determining when the student is ready to exit SLIFE status.

Each of these four categories is addressed in a dedicated section of the SLIFE Services and Support Plan, ensuring that academic and linguistic needs, social-emotional supports, family and community engagement, and progress monitoring for exiting SLIFE status are each systematically planned and documented for every student. We will now review each section in detail.

**Slide 58:**

Step 4 - Focal Point 1: Academic and Linguistic Support – includes five specific indicators. In Step Four, this focal point addresses the essential academic and language-learning needs of SLIFE.

Due to gaps in formal education, SLIFE require targeted, strengths-based support to succeed in Massachusetts classrooms. Academic and linguistic support is designed to ensure SLIFE have equitable, effective access to language development and grade-appropriate content.

Review each of the five indicators for academic and linguistic support and assess how effectively your program meets each one.

**Slide 59:**

Step Four - Focal Point 2: Social-Emotional Support—includes two specific indicators, both of which are essential for SLIFE.

The purpose is to strategically plan and document supports that promote SLIFEs’ sense of belonging, psychological safety, and emotional well-being within the school environment.

**Slide 60:**

Step Four, Focal Point 3: Family and Community Connections

The hope is to intentionally build and maintain strong partnerships with families, caregivers, and community organizations that support the social-emotional health and academic achievement of SLIFE.

This focal point contains one clearly defined indicator: Evaluate how your program facilitates ongoing, meaningful engagement with families and community partners to meet SLIFEs’ unique needs.

**Slide 61:**

Step Four, Focal Point 4: Progress Monitoring and SLIFE Exit Criteria

This focal point centers on systematically tracking SLIFEs’ academic growth, language development, and overall well-being. The goal is to collect and analyze data to inform instructional decisions and ensure appropriate, timely transitions out of SLIFE status.

What are your district’s clearly defined policies and criteria for monitoring SLIFE progress and determining when a student is ready to exit SLIFE status?

How effectively do staff interpret and use progress monitoring data to guide student support and instructional adjustments?

Are there consistent protocols for documenting and communicating SLIFE progress and exit decisions?

Use this collaborative review to highlight program strengths and pinpoint specific areas for improvement.

**Slide 62:**

After completing the SLIFE District Self-Assessment and reaching consensus, the team should systematically review the results to clearly identify specific program strengths and pinpoint concrete areas requiring improvement.

Let’s review the scoring procedures

**Slide 63:**

This slide provides an example of the scoring procedures using Step 1 for demonstration purposes.

You will notice there are 5 indicators for Step 1. The first indicator was scored at 4. Then the next four indicators each received a score of 2.

You will notice in the bottom row, there are no total tallies for indicators with a score of 1 – the total for indicators with scores of 2 is 8 - there were no scores of 3 – and one indicator receive a score of 4 – As you see there is a 4 in the bottom row of that column.

The first calculation is to add the totals for each column – The total here is 12.

The next calculation is to divide the total by the number of indicators – So here you see the second calculation is 12 divided by 5 indicators equals an average of 2.4 for Step 1.

**Slide 64:**

At the top of the Self-Check – there is a table to include the compiled scores.

**Slide 65:**

Here we have added scores for the first three steps.

**Slide 66:**

The next line is for the average score in the first part of step 4.

**Slide 67:**

Next, include the averages for each focal point in step 4.

**Slide 68:**

Now average all five scores for step four to get the true step four average. In this case the average is 2.8 – but as you will notice – the individual focal point scores provide some interesting information for discussion.

Review these scores carefully: Identify specific points where your district demonstrates clear strengths and note those areas needing targeted development or improvement.

Consider the most effective process for your district to complete the self-assessment. Would it be best for individuals to assess independently before gathering to reach consensus, or would a collaborative, step-by-step consensus process be more effective? In the latter case, document discussion notes directly within the assessment tool for clarity and reference.

Looking at these scores – where do you think this team might begin their work?

If your team is using the Google Sheets tool, it will automatically compute scores and generate visual representations of your district’s progress in SLIFE Identification, Services, and Support. For illustrative purposes, an example dataset is provided in that format to guide your analysis and discussion.

**Slide 69:**

This Self-Check phase provides a structured opportunity for the team to reflect on the scores with specific prompts. Team members should deliberately discuss each identified strength and area for growth, drawing on documented evidence. Consult the guidance document as you analyze results and record key insights within the assessment tool for future reference.

**Slide 70:**

According to the SLIFE guidance document (DESE, 2024), districts should establish a dedicated SLIFE Team and initiate the process for a structured self-assessment. During planning, districts are encouraged to intentionally incorporate student and family input—through surveys, focus groups, or interviews—so that program development and district policy decisions are directly informed by students’ lived experiences and perspectives.

**Slide 71:**

A supplementary resource, the SLIFE District Self-Assessment: Student and Family Data Collection Form, offers explicit instructions and practical examples to inform your reflection process. Actively gathering student and family feedback—via interviews, surveys, or focus groups—ensures that SLIFE programming addresses authentic needs and priorities identified by those directly impacted.

You may choose to complete the quantitative self-assessment first, reserving the reflection and action planning for a subsequent meeting once student and family input has been collected and reviewed. This approach allows sufficient time to integrate real stakeholder perspectives, strengthening the relevance and effectiveness of your district’s SLIFE program development.

**Slide 72:**

Action Plan Review

**Slide 73:**

After gathering all relevant self-assessment data and stakeholder feedback, your team should move to the Action Plan Review phase, where concrete next steps and responsibilities are identified based on the analyzed findings.

During the Action Plan Review, the team should systematically examine the consensus scores from the self-assessment and clearly identify both the district’s strongest areas and the specific priority steps requiring immediate action. For each priority, explicitly connect it to a clearly defined problem of practice that the team can address.

Facilitate targeted discussion to determine what **immediate actions** are realistically achievable, considering available resources and existing constraints. Specify which resources—such as personnel, time allocations, or data systems—will be utilized for each step.

For each goal, define precise, measurable outcomes and set a clear timeline for completion. Establish in advance how progress will be monitored and what evidence will confirm that the goal has been met. This structured, data-driven approach ensures accountability and drives meaningful improvement.

Action steps should be organized by timeline:

* Immediate (Do Now): Within 1 month as seen here.

**Slide 74:**

* Near-Future (Do Soon): Within 6–12 months

**Slide 75:**

* And finally, Long-Term (Do Later): Within 12–18 months

This structured approach ensures targeted, accountable improvement.

**Slide 76:**

The collaborative discussions your team conducts—when scoring the self-assessment, analyzing district-level results, and constructing the action plan—directly inform the prioritization and allocation of resources for each phase. We have included specific tools to support these processes.

**Slide 77:**

Email questions to the Office of Language Acquisition at [el@doe.mass.edu](mailto:el@doe.mass.edu)

Thank you.