

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions about English Language Learners (ELL)

1. What are different names that may be used when talking about students who do not have English as their primary language?

ELL means English Language Learner. ELL is the most common acronym used for students whose primary language is not English. LEP is Limited English Proficient. ESL is English as a Second Language. ESOL is English to Speakers of Other Languages. Students who did not learn English as their native tongue and/or continue to use other than English as a dominant language would be considered an English language learner.

2. What is ESOL?

ESOL is the name Georgia has given to its program for teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

3. What are the goals of ESOL program?

The ESOL program in Clayton County is designed to meet the needs of students for whom English is not their dominant language. The goal is to prepare students for success in school and in society through the development of cultural awareness and English language proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. There is a particular emphasis on the skills necessary for students to meet standards on the ACCESS for ELLs (a language proficiency exam), the Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) and Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHS GT).

4. How should an English language learner be placed?

ELLs should have an age-appropriate placement. In the beginning, the student may seem to be lost and not understand anything happening in the classroom. Cognitively, however, the student will have achieved the same grade equivalency in his/her home school. The student has the ability to understand the classroom assignments, but will need time to develop the English to understand and do assignments. When students enter our school system who have had very little education in their home country, it is still appropriate to place them in age-appropriate classes. If progress is not being made, teachers may request an SST meeting to develop an individualized academic plan for the student.

5. When a student from another country speaks English and understands what I say to him, why does he need to be tested for the ESOL program with the WIDA ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT)?

Just because a student speaks English does not necessarily mean the student can read, write and do other academic tasks in English. The federal law requires that all ELLs be assessed for English language proficiency so that language assistance can be given to students who need academic help with English.

6. How can I evaluate an ELL student in the classroom? How can I assess progress without oral language?

Research states that it takes 4-10 years for students to become proficient in English.¹ English language learners will acquire language in much the same way a child learns a first language.² The CAN DO Descriptors (chart below) will help you to understand the linguistic processes a student goes through. Expect the student to respond according to the levels of proficiency. Use the CAN DO Descriptors in instructing and evaluating ELL students.

¹ Thomas, W.P & Collins, V.P. (2001). A National Study of School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students' Long-Term Academic Achievement. Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence.
http://www.crede.ucsc.edu/research/llaa/1.1_final.html

² Cummins, J. (1999). BICS and CALP: Clarifying the Distinction. ED 438 551.



CAN DO Descriptors for the Levels of English Language Proficiency

For the given level of English language proficiency level, English language learners can:

Language Domain	Level 1- Entering	Level 2- Beginning	Level 3- Developing	Level 4- Expanding	Level 5- Bridging	Level 6- Reaching
Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Point to stated pictures, words, phrases Follow one-step oral directions Match oral statements to objects, figures, or illustrations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sort pictures, objects according to oral instructions Follow two-step oral directions Match information from oral descriptions to objects, illustrations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Locate, select, order information from oral descriptions Follow multi-step oral directions Categorize or sequence oral information using pictures, objects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compare and contrast functions, relationships from oral information Analyze and apply oral information Identify cause and effect from oral discourse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draw conclusions from oral information Construct models based on oral discourse Make connections from oral discourse 	
Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name objects, people, pictures Answer wh- questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask wh- questions Describe pictures, events, objects, people Restate facts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formulate hypotheses, make predictions Describe processes, procedures Re/tell stories or events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss stories, issues, concepts Give speeches, oral reports Offer creative solutions to issues, problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage in debates Explain phenomena, give examples, and justify responses Express and defend points of view 	
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Match icons and symbols to words, phrases, or environmental print Identify concepts about print and text features 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Locate and classify information Identify facts and explicit messages Select language patterns associated with facts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sequence pictures, events, processes Identify main ideas Use context clues to determine meaning of words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interpret information or data Find details that support main ideas Identify word families, figures of speech 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct research to glean information from multiple sources Draw conclusions from explicit and implicit text 	
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Label objects, pictures, diagrams Draw in response to oral directions Produce icons, symbols, words, phrases to convey messages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make lists Produce drawings, phrases, short sentences, notes Give information requested from oral or written directions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce bare-bones expository or narrative texts Compare/contrast information Describe events, people, processes, procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarize information from graphics or notes Edit and revise writing Create original ideas or detailed responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply information to new contexts React to multiple genres and discourses Author multiple forms of writing 	

7. What kind of materials can be used by the classroom teacher? Where can I get materials for implementation or modification?

Teachers can use tapes, magazines, pictures, comic books, catalogs, flash cards, computer programs, a variety of websites, videos, television, on grade level materials that have been adapted or other materials in your school's media center. Ask other teachers about materials that have worked for them. Ask the ESOL teacher in your building for ideas for specific resources and ways to modify materials used in your classroom. The Georgia Department of Education GLC website at <http://www.glc.k12.ga.us/homepg.htm> has an ESOL page that provides many lessons and strategies.

8. What do I do with a student who seems to be just sitting there? What is the "silent period"?

The "silent period" is a valid learning time. Do not be overly concerned if your new arrival is silent and this continues for several weeks (and sometimes months). Opportunities for the student to observe are valuable for his/her language acquisition. A surprising amount of learning takes place when the student sits and observes. Make sure your instruction includes clues (such as pictures, gestures, other realia) so that the student can connect content with language. Do include the student in all activities and give opportunities for the student to perform tasks, even if he/she is silent.

9. Where can I obtain a dual-language picture dictionary?

Most media centers may have *The New Oxford Picture Dictionary*, *Longman Photo Dictionary* or *The Basic Newbury House Dictionary of American English*. If your media center does not have one of those dictionaries, be sure to ask the media specialist to order one for your student to use. In the meantime, ask the ESOL teacher if you can borrow a suitable dictionary. Computer programs such as *Usborne's Animated First Thousand Words* and *Rosetta Stone* are helpful for teaching English.

10. Who needs to be served by the ESOL program?

All students whose first language is other than English should be identified and, if appropriate, screened for language assistance using the Short LAB (until March 2007) or the *WIDA-ACCESS Placement Test* (W-APT) (after March 2007). According to the state guidelines, a student who scores below a cut-score qualifies for ESOL instruction. If the scores are marginal, other reading comprehension assessments may be administered and considered in placement. *ACCESS for ELLs* is the primary assessment tool used to determine continued eligibility for the program.

11. How can I make a student feel good on the first day?

Relax! Smile! Be welcoming! Be patient and gentle. Use common sense. Your attitude toward the new student will influence the attitudes of your students. If you regard the arrival of a new student from another culture as an enriching experience, it will be. Arrange a tour of the school building to include introducing the new student to school personnel. Carefully choose a dependable student, not necessarily one who speaks the same language, to serve as a buddy. Continue with the buddy system, but rotate this responsibility.

12. When should I start grading ELLs like a regular student?

Start grading ELLs like other students as language proficiency increases. In the meantime, have high, but realistic, expectations of what the ELL student should learn in your classroom. Refer to the chart in question #6 as guidance for ways to plan differentiated instruction and accommodations for ELLs. Talk to the ESOL teacher in your building about accommodating ELL students and ways to evaluate their work.

13. What do I do about a student who will not orally respond in class?

In most cases, it is best not to put ELLs on the spot by asking them to orally participate before they are ready. Until your student is comfortable, do not expect him/her to talk. It takes courage for an English language learner to take a chance on making a mistake in front of an entire class. Small group work or work with partners will encourage these students to speak sooner. Encourage them to answer questions that can be answered with “yes” or “no” before progressing to questions which require more difficult responses. Accept and reinforce all attempts. Rather than correcting errors, model correct responses.

14. How much help with homework can the classroom teacher expect from the ESOL teacher?

The ESOL teacher will probably be happy to give help with homework before or after the ESOL class period, if she/he has the time; however, time does not permit ESOL teachers to give extensive individual help and to implement ESOL lessons that have been made to help each student in the group gain proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing English. Teaching vocabulary used in content classes so that ELLs can be successful in regular instructional periods is a high priority for lessons given by ESOL teachers. Highest priority must be given to the development of the skills which will help the student make a successful transition to a new language, a new culture, and become successful in your classroom.

15. What can be done to help ELLs with homework or classwork?

If you give homework, in subjects other than math (computation), limit the amount of work you give but continue to have high expectations. Remember that English help is unlikely to be available at home. Use buddies for help with classwork. Remember that the student cannot succeed even in math if he/she does not understand the English directions. Help the student particularly with word problems in math.

16. How can I get ELLs to work cooperatively in groups?

Do not hesitate to assign ELLs to groups, but be realistic about individual expectations. Create a balance between ELLs and native English speakers and allow the group to make presentations or products that can include students who are uncomfortable speaking in front of a whole class.

17. How can I adapt Social Studies or Science curriculum to meet the needs of ELLs?

Start with the basics. Choose a few important vocabulary words to be defined. Draw from the student’s knowledge of his/her native country and use the student as a resource whenever possible. Have the ELL research a topic from his/her culture to correspond to the one you are teaching. (You will be facilitating the student’s English vocabulary acquisition of a topic that he/she knows about.) Use newspapers and the internet. Understand that ELLs are disadvantaged in Social Studies and Science because they lack needed reading skills and because ELLs do not have general knowledge and vocabulary common to the American students in your classroom. **What can you do at testing time?** Try some of the following ideas. Give open-book tests. Allow the student to use a dictionary in his/her native language during the testing. Allow for extra testing time. Avoid essay questions. Consider testing the student orally in an individual situation.

18. Should teachers try to discourage the use of the native language in the home?

No. Research shows that the use of the primary language in the home does not decrease a child’s ability to learn a second language. A rich experience in a first language has a positive effect on the acquisition of a second language. The more the acquirer develops his/her native language, the quicker English is learned. Students should be made to feel that both their native language and their native culture are important and that there is something very special about speaking two languages or more.

19. Why do some students learn English faster than others?

There are a variety of reasons why some students learn language faster than others. One reason can be that they have more facility for learning language. Sometimes it is easier for students who have their first language based in an Indo-European language grammatical structure. Some students may have difficulties because they had little formal education in their home country. These students will not have the experience of learning language for use in an academic setting and may find academic tasks (like reading and writing) particularly difficult.

20. How many languages do ESOL teachers know how to speak? What preparation does an ESOL teacher need?

Actually, the only language an ESOL teacher has to know is English. The ESOL teacher is required to understand theories in linguistics, particularly how students acquire a second language. A helpful attribute is to be able to empathize with the student's desire to learn English and his/her difficulty in doing so. The ESOL teacher must be certified in ESOL or have an ESOL Endorsement to teach ESOL. Three courses, Cultural Issues, ESOL Methods and Materials, and Applied Linguistics, are required by the State of Georgia for the ESOL Endorsement.

21. When a teacher needs an interpreter to communicate with parents, is it good to use a student who knows English and the other language spoken? Are using translation websites a good idea?

In most cases, if you can get the assistance of another adult (in your school) or request the assistance of the bilingual paraprofessionals or community liaisons in Clayton County, it will facilitate the conversation with the parents. Using students can cause role difficulties and breach confidentiality. When calling or writing a parent please get the assistance of a bilingual paraprofessional or community liaison or ask the parent to bring a family member or friend who can interpret during a parent teacher conference. Many CCPS translations prepared by Clayton County translators can be found at the Second Language Learning website (click on "Services") at the webpage for Clayton County Public Schools <http://www.clayton.k12.ga.us/SecondLanguageLearning/ils/>. Please note that internet translation sites are not reliable to produce good translations.

22. How can I find out what kinds of things are done in an ESOL class?

Talk with your ESOL teacher. Better yet, schedule a visit or plan to co-teach with an ESOL teacher in your classroom.

References

Cummins, J. (1999). BICS and CALP: Clarifying the Distinction. ED 438 551.

Thomas, W.P & Collins, V.P. (2001). A National Study of School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students' Long-Term Academic Achievement. Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence. http://www.crede.ucsc.edu/research/llaa/1.1_final.html