

# Understanding Multilingual Learners and Newcomer Students in California

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While the assets and needs of Multilingual Learners and Newcomer students may vary, the state has a process through which families, students and schools go through when students register for school. When enrolling any students in a California TK-12 public school, caregivers complete a home language survey. This survey identifies students who speak only English at home as English only (EO). Those students identified as having a language other than English at home are assessed for their English language proficiency within the first 30 days of enrollment. Based on this assessment, students who are determined to have sufficient English language proficiency to access the curriculum without additional support are identified as Initially Fluent English Proficient (IFEP), while those who require additional English language development support are identified as multilingual/ English learners (EL). Additionally, as students move through the grades, multilingual students that achieve English language proficiency are identified as Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP) students.

## Newcomer Students

Newcomer students are a linguistically and culturally diverse group that encompasses recent immigrant youth, refugees, asylees, unaccompanied minors, migratory children, students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE), and more. Newcomers have varying levels of English proficiency – most, but not all are identified as multilingual learners – and add a rich, diverse heritage of multilingualism and culture to the classroom, to schools and to their communities, imparting unique knowledge that strengthens the learning environment for all students.

## Multilingual Learners

Our education system recognizes that there is no single English Learner (EL) or multilingual profile and no one-size approach that works for everyone. Educators, advocates and policymakers alike strive to create programs, curricula, and instruction responsive to the linguistic, cultural, social and academic needs of the various dual language learners and English learner profiles. Here are common classifications and key characteristics:

Multilingual Typology & Characteristics	Needs	Implications
<p><b>Newcomer;</b> Recent arrival in U.S., three years or less. Little or no U.S. English proficiency on arrival. Some enroll with transferable credits.</p>	<p>Support for cultural transition to U.S. Survival English ELD often needed. Supports related to refugee or immigration experience may be needed.</p>	<p>Enrollment during the school year requires flexible placements. Foreign transcript analysis to give credit and determine appropriate course placement. Comprehensive initial assessment.</p>
<p><b>Well-educated Newcomer;</b> Has been in the U.S. three years or less. Strong literacy skills in a native or first language. Can make rapid progress toward English proficiency.</p>	<p>Support for cultural transition to U.S. Survival English ELD often needed. Supports related to refugee or immigration experience may be needed.</p>	<p>Foreign transcript analysis to give credit and determine appropriate course placement. Gaps in U.S. curriculum may lead to need for accelerated credit accumulation.</p>
<p><b>Underschooled SLIFE (Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal education);</b> Little to no literacy in native language. Formal schooling was interrupted. Typically struggle in grade-level academic courses.</p>	<p>Need foundational literacy. Need foundational math. Need home language academic resources. Where possible, development of home language literacy and courses or supports that utilize home language for instruction.</p>	<p>Slower acquisition of English calls for extended time for intensive ELD. Often requires extended time in school (summer school, afterschool, evening, extra year). Educational planning toward attainment of high school diploma.</p>
<p><b>Long Term English Learners (LTELs);</b> Have been in the U.S. six or more years. English proficiency may be stalled or slow developing. Often exhibit oral fluency. May have lost or not fully developed native language proficiency. Often have academic gaps.</p>	<p>Benefit from focus on academic English and literacy skills (writing as well as reading). Benefit from courses to develop literacy in home language. Benefit from study skills.</p>	<p>Assessment of specific academic gaps that may have been accrued—and a program to address those. Accumulate relevant texts. Enlist mentors to engage in student-driven goal setting. Instruction with scaffolds like LTEL</p>
<p><b>Dually identified ELs with special needs;</b> ELs who have been identified both by the ELPAC process as in need of language services, and by the special education IEP process as having special need.</p>	<p>Both language development supports and special education accommodations are required.</p>	<p>In the IEP process, the nature of accommodations needed by the student—including the intersection with needs as ELs should be specified.</p>
<p><b>Dual Language Learners (DLLs);</b> More than 60% of children under the age of five are Dual Language Learners. DLLs are children who are simultaneously learning and/or developing proficiency in two or more languages. Often face barriers to accessing inclusive and high-quality early childhood education.</p>	<p>Benefit from culturally inclusive pedagogy that supports home language and bilingual development. Benefit from explicit and frequent messages of affirmation. Need strong partnerships with families; Home-school connections related to curriculum and theme.</p>	<p>Materials are authentic to and inclusive of the families, cultures, languages and communities of the children in the program. Thematic units include explicit connection to and embrace of presence in the cultures, languages, communities of the children. Monitor equity in participation.</p>



## Languages Spoken at Home

Multilingual Learners come to school with rich linguistic and cultural assets. Bilingualism and cultural diversity are important assets that improve student outcomes and also strengthen our public education system. Schools must leverage and acknowledge these assets in order to improve outcomes for all students, in particular those participating in programs leading to bilingualism and biliteracy.

During the 2022-23 school year, there were over 100 unique languages spoken at home by English learners. Amongst these, Spanish is spoken at home for 82 percent of ELs and 76 percent of all students who come from a house where another language other than English is spoken. However, in many districts and schools, other languages may be more prominent amongst students and the community. For example, there are 21 languages spoken by at least 2,000 ELs.

## Resources - Long Term English Learners:

- [Renewing Our Promise](#)
- [Meeting the Unique Needs of Long Term English Learners: A Guide for Educators](#)
- [Implications for Serving Dual Language Learners and Their Families: Overview Report](#)
- [Dual Language Learner Identification Guide](#)
- [Support for Immigrant & Refugee Students](#)
- [Core Stressors of Newcomers](#)

