

# Updated Guidance for Teaching English Learners in Pennsylvania

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New state guidance released this month more clearly fleshes out a school's responsibility toward its English learners and the rights those students have.

The new guidance from the Pennsylvania Department of Education issued in a basic education circular titled "[Educating English Language Learners](#)" outlines what a district must provide for these students that total about 61,000 in the state and speak more than 200 distinct languages.

The circular updates federal guidance from January 2015 after a wealth of high-profile cases both in Pennsylvania and across the country necessitated more updated information.

In the new guidance, the state said it requires that language instruction educational programs be based on sound educational and language learning theory, be implemented with sufficient resources, staffed by appropriately prepared personnel and be periodically evaluated.

The revised guidance goes into more detail for these three requirements noting that programs must:

- Be aligned to state academic content standards for the appropriate grade level of the student

- Include English Language Development instruction delivered by properly certified teachers who hold an ESL program specialist certificate or who are working in conjunction with ESL certified teachers

- Incorporate the use of the [Pennsylvania English Language Development Standards](#)

- Provide equitable access to content for students at all language proficiency levels by providing research-based bilingual or sheltered instruction

- Not limit the enrollment of English learners in any course or academic program where they would otherwise be eligible.

As for the appropriate allocation of resources and staffing, as well as assessing program effectiveness, schools and districts must:

- Employ an adequate number of properly licensed ESL teachers

- Ensure there is sufficient time available for ESL teachers to collaborate with content teachers so that content is made accessible to English learners and to monitor the progress of the students in content classes

- Purchase and maintain specialized materials such as native language literature and translation dictionaries to support student needs

- Ensure that the program is provided with the same resources as other academic programs in the district/school

- Provide for adequate professional development for all staff working with English learners

- Conduct annual reviews so that programming results in meaningful outcomes for individual students

The July 1 guidance also addresses effective communication with families and encouraging parents and guardians to be actively involved in the education of their children. Schools should provide annual notice of the child's continued participation in the program and describe the program and its intended benefits. In addition, it should provide information regarding the right to refuse services; as well as a description of any [Title III supplemental services](#) offered.

The guidance also includes requirements related to eligibility for special education students who are English learners, an issue that was the subject of a [February 10 Barley Snyder alert](#).

If you have any additional questions regarding the scope of your responsibility in this area, or if we can provide any assistance as you review your existing policies and procedures, please do not hesitate to contact any of the attorneys in [Barley Snyder's Education Practice Group](#).

*Barley Snyder summer associate Zachary Weit contributed to this alert. Zach is a second-year law student at Penn State Law.*