



CONNECTION TIPS

Supporting English Language Learners

What's Going On?

Learning from home for English Language Learner (ELL) students during a pandemic is likely to have created additional challenges. Prior planning may be helpful for ELL students and staff.

Tips to Consider

- ❑ While school is still virtual, strive for on-going connection/ communication with students and their families. ELL teachers often play the informal role of case managers with their students and this is an optimal time to do so. Also, ELL teachers are often the only source for additional English language tutoring support, or a way to get English language books that children need; providing either strengthens the home-school relationship.
- ❑ Enlist interpreters when reaching out to families. If paying for translation services is problematic for your district, become creative regarding who might serve as an interpreter—as long as the information to be shared is not expected to be confidential in nature. Older adult siblings, an extended family member, a volunteer from a local community agency that supports “new arrivals” (i.e. Mary’s place) may be willing to help you reach out to a family to field questions and ensure the ELL student and family members are connected to school. For confidential conversations, enlist professional interpreters or, if that is not possible, a staff member from your school community—if there is one.
- ❑ Monitor for effects of social isolation on ELL students. While it is uncertain what the short-term and long-term impacts of social isolation are for all students, ELL students may be particularly vulnerable. ELL students often enjoy the routine and sociability of attending in-person school, and often do not have family members at home who are able to help with homework. Refugees or their families: have experienced trauma before coming to the US; often live in neighborhoods that are unsafe or lack services; frequently do not have reliable transportation; have additional struggles due to the digital divide that adversely affects families living in poverty. Teachers and others having frequent contact with families should listen for concerns, observe student behaviors, and expediently and directly communicate needs and concerns to administrative and/ or mental health staff.
- ❑ Provide written communication in the student’s first language! There are local services that provide translations, but again, use caution when information is sensitive or confidential. On-line free translation might be an option but often does not convey information clearly, and might convey misinformation.

- ❑ Consider a “Socially Distanced Open House” as it may be even more beneficial as schools re-open. Parents/ grandparents/ guardians and students will be able to see and understand the differences you have made physically to prepare students for a safe return to the campus/ school. Reach out in advance to make sure that families will be attending and/or provide more than one time slot to accommodate family schedules.
- ❑ Schedule tours during the Open House to help students learn their new schedules. This will be especially important for ELL’s who may be transitioning from elementary to middle school or middle school to high school.
- ❑ If possible with the school’s distancing protocols, consider setting up a buddy or mentor system whereby students who are newer arrivals will be teamed with students from the same culture/ language group that are experienced in and feel safe with the school rules, routines and relationships. Create a process to “train” the mentor buddy to help, and introduce the mentor and new arrival to one another before school starts or at the beginning of school.
- ❑ Understanding COVID Protocols and Procedures:
 - Pay to have these protocols translated so that all information, including contact information, is crystal clear.
 - Identify persons who will be able to communicate with families in their first language if one of their children displays COVID-19-like symptoms at school, or one of their children has been in the vicinity of an individual displaying COVID-19-like symptoms.
 - For younger ELL students, develop visual representations/pictures denoting COVID-19 safety protocols in classrooms and hallways. Use real people, emojis or whatever you think your student population would understand and respond to most easily, e.g, pictures of students washing hands, physical distancing markings, or movement patterns on the floor.
 - Create and refer to posted visuals on the wall that show individuals who might be feeling unwell. Teach young children, or children with limited English to point to those picture if they are not feeling well, or if someone at home is unwell. Teach English words/phrases regarding sickness or symptoms to the students right from the beginning to assist them in communicating if they do not feel well; particularly teach vocabulary associated with COVID-19 symptoms.