

Home Language Survey Guidance

The Home Language Survey (HLS) is the first step in identifying students who may qualify for English language development services under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and Washington State's Transitional Bilingual Instruction Program (TBIP). This process is a civil rights obligation that ensures equitable access to educational opportunities for multilingual learners (MLs).

All families who enroll their child in a Washington State school must complete a Home Language Survey. Refer to Chapter 2 in the [Washington State Policies and Practices Guide](#) for specific guidance on this requirement and process.

Best Practices for Administering the Survey

District staff should begin by explaining the purpose of the HLS in clear, family-friendly language. Families need to understand that the survey helps schools provide appropriate support for language development and academic success. Eligibility must always be determined through the required screening process. Staff should avoid assumptions about a student's language needs based on appearance, surname, or perceived fluency.

Interpretation services should be available so families receive oral explanations in their preferred language, and written materials should be translated accurately. Skilled interpreters should be provided who are knowledgeable about the TBIP for families needing language assistance, including those with limited literacy, sign language needs, low vision, or braille needs.

For online registration, provide translated electronic or hard-copy enrollment forms in the district's most common languages and follow up to confirm families understood and answered accurately. Keep the dated survey or printout of responses in the student's cumulative file.

How to Process the Home Language Survey Responses

Right to Translation and Interpretation Services	Question 1 (CEDARS Element B43) • Question 1 of the Home Language Survey provides districts with the information needed to satisfy the reporting requirements related to RCW 28A.183 - Language Access Program. • For students with more than two guardians, districts should collect information for each guardian to ensure effective two-way communication between school staff and families. • Information regarding translation and interpretation services must be updated annually. Therefore, districts must develop a protocol for families to review and update their translation and interpretation preferences on an annual basis.
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Eligibility for Language Development Support	Question 2 (CEDARS Element B17) Question 3 (CEDARS Element B18) • If the response to either question 2 or 3 is a language other than English, refer the student for testing with the state-approved language proficiency placement test. • If the family indicates the child first spoke or understood English and another language simultaneously or currently uses both English and another language, administer the state-approved language proficiency placement test. The language other than English is reported in CEDARS. • If the response to questions 2 and 3 is English only, the student is considered proficient and does not need to be screened. Question 4 • If a language other than English is indicated in question 4 or in question 1 above, but the student's first and primary language is identified as English, follow up with parents/guardians to ensure that the questions were answered accurately. Question 5 • Responses to Question 5 can help in determining if a student has been previously identified as a multilingual learner in Washington or another state. Districts should look up the student in the LEP Application in the EDS system to determine whether the student has already been identified in Washington. If the student has been previously identified, a language proficiency placement test is not needed, and the student should be placed directly into the TBIP program.
Prior Education	Question 6 (CEDARS Element B10) • This question is not intended to identify students' immigration status, but it may trigger supplemental federal funding for recent immigrants. Families are not required to answer this question and have the option to leave this question blank. Question 7 (CEDARS Element B34) • This question provides important information regarding a student's educational assets and experience and may inform program placement. • Please note that this question asks for the number of months, not years, that a student received education outside of the U.S. Families may be confused by this question and need clarification to capture this accurately. Question 8 (CEDARS Element B32) • This information is also used to identify districts with an influx of recent immigrants for supplemental federal funding.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

The following FAQs also can help districts anticipate and address common questions and concerns that may arise during the Home Language Survey process.

1. Can staff modify the Home Language Survey questions?

No. The HLS must use OSPI-approved wording to ensure consistency and compliance with state and federal requirements. Altering the questions could lead to inaccurate identification and potential civil rights violations. If staff have concerns about clarity, they should provide oral explanations in family-friendly language.

2. What should staff do if a parent refuses to complete the HLS?

The HLS is part of the enrollment process for all students in Washington. Explain the purpose of the HLS in supporting student success. Help families understand it determines eligibility for language services. Communicate with cultural responsiveness and respect. If the parent still refuses, notify the district Multilingual (ML) Director or Coordinator immediately.

3. How should staff respond if a parent asks about immigration status?

Clarify that the HLS and language services are not connected to immigration status and are solely for educational support. Reassure families that information collected is used only to provide appropriate academic services and is protected under privacy laws. Question 6 on the HLS is not required for enrolling a student at a Washington school district and may be left blank if the family do not wish to disclose that information.

4. How should staff respond when parents ask for an estimated timeline for their child to exit the English language development program?

Explain that exiting from the program depends on meeting Washington State's English language proficiency standards, which are measured through the annual WIDA ACCESS assessment. Progress depends on factors such as prior schooling, literacy in the home language, and instructional support. Providing a timeline could create unrealistic expectations, so instead, reassure families that services aim to accelerate language development and support academic success.

5. What should staff do if a parent asks to change the information on the HLS after it has been submitted?

Do not finalize the change immediately. Notify the district ML Director or Coordinator before making any updates. The program director should meet with the parent/guardian to understand the reason for the change, provide accurate information about the role of the HLS, and ensure the decision is informed. Because the HLS is a legal document tied to civil rights obligations, any changes must be documented and justified to maintain compliance.

6. How can staff guide parents with best practices when they request to opt out of language services?

When a parent expresses interest in opting their child out, staff should approach the conversation with empathy, clarity, and cultural responsiveness. Best practices include:

- Listening to the parents' concerns without judgment.
- Explaining the purpose of services and addressing misconceptions respectfully. Consider including the district ML Director or Coordinator in the conversation to provide additional resources and guidance.
- Avoid pressuring parents while ensuring the decision is informed.
- Clarifying that opting out does not remove English learner identification and that the student will still take annual ELP assessments.
- Providing resources on the benefits of bilingualism.
- Documenting the request using the official OSPI Parent Waiver Form.
- Keeping the door open for re-enrollment, while explaining that delaying support may require additional intervention later.

7. How should staff follow best practices if they notice that parents have completed more than one Home Language Survey with conflicting answers?

Follow OSPI Multilingual Education guidance by using the original HLS for eligibility purposes. If discrepancies are found, approach the family with cultural responsiveness to clarify their concerns. Staff may also want to contact the district ML Director or Coordinator for support and resources to ensure accurate information and compliance with state guidance. Always notify the district ML Director or Coordinator about the existence of multiple surveys and collaborate to provide further support and resources to the family.

Scenarios and Recommended Responses

Parent: *I don't want my child labeled.*

Response: Language support is not a label - it is a federally protected right designed to help your child succeed academically while maintaining their home language. Research shows that bilingual students often outperform peers when given proper support.

Parent: *I'm worried about immigration consequences.*

Response: This information is confidential and used only for educational purposes. Federal law prohibits sharing this information with immigration authorities.

Parent: *My child speaks English fine at home.*

Response: Conversational English is different from academic language, which is used in all subjects, textbooks, and tests. Academic language is essential for understanding content, achieving in school, reaching full potential, and succeeding in school and beyond.

Parent: *Will my child fall behind in regular classes?*

Response: No. Integrated English language development ensures your child learns grade-level content while developing English proficiency.

Parent: *I just want my child to learn English since we speak a different language at home.*

Response: Research shows that continuing to use the home language supports cognitive development and helps strengthen English learning. All students receive English instruction.

Parent: *Can I opt out of ML services now and join later?*

Response: Yes, you can opt out of ML services at any time, but we recommend starting services immediately to avoid gaps in language development. Delaying support often means additional time and intervention will be needed later.

Parent: *How long will my child be in the program?*

Response: There is no fixed timeline. Exiting depends on meeting Washington State's English proficiency standards, which vary by individual and are measured through annual assessments.

Parent: *I want to change the Home Language Survey information.*

Response: We can review that together. Before making changes, the program director will meet with you to understand your concerns and provide accurate information about the role of the HLS.

Parent: *I heard bilingual programs slow down English learning.*

Response: Research shows bilingual programs accelerate English development while supporting academic achievement. Students who maintain their home language often perform better in the long term.

Compliance Alignment

All recommendations in this guideline are consistent with [OSPI's Multilingual Learner Policies and Practices Guide](#) which outlines requirements for language access, documentation, and family engagement in the HLS process.