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## Introduction

The number of students in schools across the country who are culturally and linguistically diverse is growing every year. These students, often referred to as *English language learners* or *ELLs*, are learning English while they also learn grade-level academic material. Because they have different levels of ability to communicate in English, they need support in the English language to help them be successful in school and beyond. It is expected that this population of students will continue to grow.<sup>i</sup>

The growing population of English language learners impacts *school communities*<sup>ii</sup> in many ways. This bulletin discusses the impact on family engagement practices. In other words, our focus will be on how schools and *families*<sup>iii</sup> work together to support student learning. This is important because *students benefit when families and schools work together to support student learning*.<sup>iv</sup>

**Our goal in this bulletin is to raise awareness of the need for family engagement practices that take into consideration students' academic achievement and language development.** This is why we chose to write this bulletin for a dual audience—families and educators. We encourage teams of families and educators to use this resource as a tool to support their local family engagement practices.

In this issue we

- Provide a brief overview of family engagement and its relationship to student achievement
- Identify specific considerations for English language learners and their families
- Discuss a collaborative project in the state of Illinois to provide readers an example of family engagement practices focused on English language learners and their families
- Include two different tools which can be used by families and educators
- Discuss how the work with families has impacted our work here at WIDA

## Family Engagement and Language Learning

Family engagement is a critical component of the U.S. school system. In fact, it is firmly embedded within federal educational policy.<sup>v</sup> It is both a concept and an action. As a concept, it has been defined in a variety of ways by families, educators, experts, and policy makers. This means that there are multiple ways of understanding family engagement and establishing expectations for how schools and families should work together to support student learning. School communities should ensure that educators and families have opportunities to come to a shared understanding of what family engagement means for their local context. As an action,

At WIDA, we value what families do to support their children and believe that these diverse practices enrich school communities.

### What does *English language learner* mean?

The term *English language learner*, or *ELL*, is often used within school settings to refer to students who need support with the English language in order to be successful in school. It is commonly used to refer to students in Grades K–12. Other terms used include: English learner (EL), emergent bilingual (EB), or dual language learner (DLL) for children in early childhood settings.

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### Did you know?

There are many different terms used to refer to family engagement. For example, some school communities use parent involvement, home-school partnerships, home-school relationships, or parent outreach. Which term is used in your school community?

family engagement is what families and educators do together to support student learning and success, and it is also what families do in their home to support student learning. These actions, or ways of engaging, vary depending on the students, families, and

educators involved.<sup>vi</sup> No single approach to engaging in a child's education will work for all school communities.<sup>vii</sup>

## UNDERSTANDING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Family engagement can be defined as a relationship between families and educators that is:

- **Ongoing** because it should span a child's educational journey from early childhood through 12th grade
- **Mutual** because the relationship should meet the needs of both families and educators, and promote meaningful two-way communication
- **Built on trust and respect** because these are essential components to any relationship, including relationships between families and educators
- **Focused on student learning and achievement** so that students are better prepared to face the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century

It is much more meaningful to define family engagement in a way that makes sense for your school community. This involves listening to the needs of students, families, and educators. Remember, there are multiple ways of defining family engagement.

This definition provides us one way of understanding the concept of family engagement. It encompasses key aspects of how family engagement has been defined by experts in this area and how it has been defined within federal educational

policy.<sup>viii</sup> It also emphasizes the importance of establishing a relationship between families and educators.<sup>ix</sup> However, this definition may not be appropriate for all school communities. We encourage families and educators to work together and agree upon what family engagement means for their school community. When the definition comes from within, it is much more meaningful than one that is imposed on families and educators. A key consideration for school communities establishing their own definition of family engagement is to ensure that the voices of students, families, and educators are heard throughout the process.

## ENGAGING FAMILIES

There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to family engagement. It all depends on the needs of your school community.

background,<sup>x</sup> or they may choose to engage in their child's learning by being physically present in their child's school. There is no single, or one-size-fits-all, approach to family engagement; it all depends on the needs of the school community.

How does your school community approach family engagement? Are *traditional forms* of family engagement used, *nontraditional forms* of family engagement, or perhaps a combination of the two?

Families engage in their child's education in a variety of ways. Families may choose to engage in their child's learning in their home in ways that reflect the family's cultural and linguistic

background,<sup>x</sup> or they may choose to engage in their child's learning by being physically present in their child's school. There is no single, or one-size-fits-all, approach to family engagement; it all depends on the needs of the school community.

Recognizing and respecting the many ways in which families support student learning, both in school and out of school, is critical to the success of school-based family engagement practices. In fact, some

would argue that this is an essential first step for schools looking to establish strong relationships with diverse families.<sup>xi</sup> At WIDA, we value what families do to support their children, and believe that these diverse practices enrich school communities.<sup>xii</sup> Embracing the many ways in which families can support student learning requires that school communities consider family engagement practices that are both *traditional* and *nontraditional* in nature.<sup>xiii</sup> *Traditional* forms of family engagement often focus on parent attendance at important school events (e.g., parent-teacher conferences), parents volunteering in the school, or parents helping children with homework. *Nontraditional* forms of family engagement can include supporting parents from diverse backgrounds as they build leadership and advocacy skills, offering opportunities for parents to learn about their rights within the U.S. school system, or offering opportunities for staff to build the skills and knowledge needed to successfully engage with culturally and linguistically diverse families.

We encourage school communities to first identify the needs of students, and then ensure that families have a voice in planning family engagement practices within the school community. This is essential for schools serving racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse families because often these families are "told" how to parent or work with their child, and are not treated as partners in their child's education.<sup>xiv</sup> Families should have a voice in how they work with schools to support their child's learning. Providing spaces for parent voices to be heard demonstrates respect for families and supports relationship-building.



Teams of Illinois parents, parent leaders, and educators came together in October 2014 to discuss family engagement practices focused on English language learners.

## ADDING LANGUAGE LEARNING TO FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Under federal education policy, parents of English language learners have the right to be meaningfully informed of their child's progress towards the attainment of the English language.<sup>xv</sup> This includes being informed of

- How and when their child was identified as an English language learner
- Their child's level of English language proficiency
- What type of language support service, or language program, their child is entitled to receive
- Their right to accept or refuse language services
- How the language program will meet the needs of their child and help their child achieve academically
- What the specific exit requirements are for exiting the language program

**Language Development** is a process that takes time. Students move along this process at different rates.

**Language Proficiency** is a measurement of where students are in the process of language development.

*Our district held a meeting with parents of incoming Kindergarteners. As part of the presentation we used the webinar provided by the Illinois State Board of Education called "My Child is an English Language Learner. What does that mean?" We used both the English and Spanish versions. Our goal was to discuss the screening and identification process with parents of English language learners.*

*-Idalia Marin, Bilingual Coordinator, Rochelle CCSD #231, Rochelle, IL*

To protect parents' rights to meaningful information about their child's language learning and academic progress in school, family engagement practices can incorporate information on students' language development and language proficiency. Students' language learning can be incorporated into family engagement practices in many ways. The table below provides a few examples of how this could be accomplished.

Plan a student data night	Invite parents and educators to work together to interpret student scores from the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs assessment, an annual assessment of English language proficiency used in over thirty states. This not only gives educators the opportunity to share student data with parents, it also allows parents and educators to engage in discussions about language programs, language learning, and student progress. Additionally, it helps build data literacy skills, or the skills needed to read and interpret student scores, which are critical for both educators and families in today's data-driven society.
Invite families to participate in program evaluation teams	Include parents of English language learners to participate in program evaluation teams and ensure parents have a say in decisions impacting language instruction. In some states, state law requires that parents of English language learners be involved in decisions impacting language programs.
Talk about the home language(s)	Engage families in discussions about bilingualism and the home language. What are families' perspectives on bilingualism? How do their perspectives align with the language program offered at the school? What do families need to know about maintaining the home language(s)? What role do home languages play in English language development?

Family engagement practices take many forms, and the same applies for incorporating language into family engagement practices. School communities can incorporate language learning into family engagement practices in a variety of ways.

We presented the WIDA family webinar series to parents in three different sessions. During these sessions, we presented parents with their child's ACCESS for ELLs Parent/Guardian Score Report and allowed them to ask questions specifically about their child's report. After each session, parents had good discussion. Some questions they had were surprising. Even after the video presentations they still wanted to know how their child was identified as ESL (ELL). They asked for clarification on social versus academic language. They really searched for reassurance that it was a good thing for them to continue to speak Spanish at home with their children. It was important to them that their children maintain their home language, but had perceived pressure to speak English at home. They developed relationships with each other, even during this short time, and were asking each other "How did your child do?" The feedback was very positive. They said they wished they had had this information a long time ago.

-Jana Sawyer, ELL Coordinator, Carthage R9 School District, Carthage, MO

## Engaging Illinois Families of English Learners: A Collaborative Project

In 2014, a team from WIDA and the Illinois State Board of Education embarked on a collaborative project focused on family engagement and English language learners. In this section, we discuss this project in depth to provide a concrete example of how local family engagement practices can be supported at the state level. This example serves to encourage readers to envision ways to systematically support family engagement at the state, district, and school level.

### Illinois Fast Facts:

Illinois joined the WIDA Consortium in 2005.

There are roughly 210,000 English language learners enrolled in Illinois public schools.

Most of the students come from Spanish-speaking homes.

### AN INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS FOR ILLINOIS PARENTS

The initial purpose of the project was to develop a series of online resources in English and in Spanish for Illinois families of English language learners in Grades K–12. This effort resulted in a three-part webinar series called *An Introduction to English Language Standards and Assessments for Parents*, designed and developed for the state of Illinois.<sup>xvi</sup> The series provides

- Illinois-specific information on how children are identified as English language learners and the state's exit requirements
- Information on the role and purpose of the WIDA English language standards and assessments
- Information on how to interpret students' English language proficiency scores reported on the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs Parent/Guardian Score Report

While the webinars were positively received by families, teachers, and administrators, it became clear that more was needed. This led to the development of a one-day workshop for families and educators.

### FROM ONLINE TO FACE-TO-FACE: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOPS IN ILLINOIS

*What would happen if families of English language learners and educators came together to learn about family engagement practices that focus on students' language learning?* This question guided the development of the first family engagement workshop offered by WIDA in collaboration with the Illinois State Board of Education. The focus of the workshop was to promote collaboration between parents of English language learners and educators in the planning of family engagement practices. Participants attended the workshop in teams consisting of parents, parent leaders, teachers, and/or administrators.

Feedback from workshop participants was positive. Parent participants, in particular, were grateful for the opportunity to learn about language standards and assessments, and the role these tools play in their child's education. Parents also expressed concern, however, that this information is not easily or readily available to all families in a comprehensible way. This led to presentations on family engagement at educator conferences in Illinois.

### GETTING THE WORD OUT: HIGHLIGHTING PARENT PERSPECTIVES

Leticia Chaidez and Fabiola Corral are two parent leaders whose children are English language learners in Mannheim School District #83 near Chicago, IL. Attending the family engagement workshop in Illinois made a deep impact on their understanding of language learning. Because of the unique experiences Leticia and Fabiola have had as parent leaders, they were invited to co-present with Lorena Mancilla from WIDA and David González Nieto from the Illinois State Board of Education at two educator conferences in Illinois. During the presentations, Leticia and Fabiola offered suggestions to educators, from a parent perspective, on how to more effectively reach out to Latino families. They shared the challenges many parents, including themselves, face as they try to engage with the schools. They also shared how many parents overcome these challenges with the support of other parents and district staff. Having parents co-present at these educator conferences proved to be a powerful and moving experience for educators.

# Multiple Perspectives on Family Engagement: Voices from Illinois

To further elaborate on family engagement, and to offer multiple perspectives on this topic, we include in this section summaries of interviews with a state-level director, a district-level director, and two parent leaders, all four of whom participated in the collaborative project in Illinois.

## SUPPORTING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AT THE STATE LEVEL



David González Nieto is the Administrator of the Division for English Language Learning at the Illinois State Board of Education. In his role, David is responsible for overseeing all federal and state policies and funding related to the education of English language learners in the state. David and his team are also responsible for planning professional

development opportunities for Illinois teachers who support English language learners.

### A Framework for Family Engagement

In Illinois, family engagement is a state-wide initiative. For example, in 2014, the state released the *Family Engagement Framework: A Guide for Illinois School Districts, Schools and Families*.<sup>xvii</sup> This resource is intended to provide guidance on enhancing family engagement practices. The framework can help districts measure their success in family engagement. It includes rubrics which can be used to measure how families are being integrated into schools and districts. The framework recognizes the critical role of relationships between families and educators. David contributed to the development of this resource and found ways to incorporate it into the collaborative project with WIDA focused on family engagement.

### Bilingual Parent Advisory Councils

Family engagement is also promoted at the state level through the Bilingual Parent Advisory Councils,<sup>xviii</sup> or BPACs. Under state law, districts with a Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) program must also form a BPAC. Membership in BPACs includes parents, educators, and community leaders. However, a majority of the members must be parents whose children are part of the TBE program. The purpose of the BPAC is to ensure that parents have a say in the district's decisions with regard to the services provided to their children.

Districts are responsible for providing BPAC members training on information related to instructional approaches used in bilingual education, parents' rights under federal and state law, and how assessments are used for accountability purposes in the TBE program. The district must also share with the BPAC their grant application for state bilingual and federal Title III funds. David advocated for the collaborative project with WIDA because he

believed resources for families could assist the state's BPACs and help these parent leaders share information with other families.

### A Statewide Conference for Bilingual Parents

To further support BPACs, the state hosts an annual conference specifically for parents. This year was the 10th Annual Bilingual Parent Summit and over 1,300 parents and educators attended. The state provides interpreters in six different languages to ensure parents have access to the information presented. Conference sessions include topics on federal and state policy, family engagement practices, bilingualism, parents' rights, and building leadership skills.

### Working Together to Support Student Learning

When asked about additional resources needed to support family engagement, David expressed that more is needed at the state, district, and school level. For example, at the state-level, he would like to organize more opportunities for parents to engage with state-level leadership throughout the year, or offer more state-wide workshop opportunities for parent leaders. At the district-level, he believes that districts need to systematically evaluate their family engagement practices. The tools within *The Illinois Family Engagement Framework* can help districts accomplish this. At the school-level, where the relationships between families and educators are critical, David believes it is important for families and schools to establish goals for family engagement that will meet the needs of students, families, and the school. These goals should be revised as the needs of the school community change.

His experience working with families through the collaborative project with WIDA taught him that families need safe spaces where they can ask the difficult questions related to their child's education. For example, families at the workshop wanted to know how educators used students' scores, and how teachers were trained on language standards and assessments. Often, parents do not feel safe asking these questions within school settings. This means that perhaps when trying to reach out to families and create safe spaces, schools and districts may have to go into the community rather than expect the families to come to the school. The experience also reaffirmed his belief that each family is unique and wants to feel respected and welcomed in their child's school. There is no "typical family" and

To download a copy of the Illinois Family Engagement Framework visit: [www.isbe.net/family-engagement](http://www.isbe.net/family-engagement)

he believes it is important for educators to embrace the diversity the families bring to the school community and view cultural differences as an asset. Lastly, he believes that by providing families opportunities to engage with school, district, and state level educators and leaders, it strengthens family engagement, which in the end supports student learning.

## HAVING A CAN DO ATTITUDE TOWARDS FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL



Piedad Kaye serves as the Bilingual Program Director of the Mannheim School District #83 in Franklin Park, IL. The district serves a diverse community. Roughly 35% of the students enrolled are identified as English language learners. While a majority of the district's English language learners speak Spanish, a total

of 24 different languages are represented in the district. In her role as Bilingual Program Director, she oversees the screening, identification, and enrollment of English language learners. She visits classrooms on a regular basis and oversees the administrative tasks that ensure the program is running smoothly. But what she considers to be an important part of her job is to be readily available to students' families.

One way she engages with parents of English language learners is through the Bilingual Parent Advisory Council, or BPAC. The BPAC is funded through the state and its purpose is to promote family engagement. Currently, 10 parents serve on the district's BPAC, and these parents represent different schools across the district. BPAC members promote family engagement by reaching out to other parents in the community and listening to their questions and concerns. They encourage parents to attend events or learning opportunities geared toward parents. They also encourage parents to provide input on programmatic issues such as the curriculum.

According to Piedad, establishing a safe and welcoming environment is critical to working with families. District staff play an important role in creating such an environment. In her district, many bilingual clerical staff members work in the schools and many of the school leaders have a deep understanding of the cultural competency needed to work in diverse school settings. At the district level, the district has a parent liaison on staff who plays a key role in supporting the district's families, and Piedad herself makes sure parents know how to reach her if they need to speak with her. All of this, she feels, facilitates building relationships with families.

Piedad also believes that family engagement has to be a team effort. When the state offered the family engagement workshop in collaboration with WIDA, she attended with the district's parent liaison and two parent leaders from the BPAC. One of the events

held at the district following the workshop was an informational meeting on the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs Parent/Guardian Score Report.<sup>xix</sup> Piedad and the BPAC members feel this type of event is important because it helps parents make sense of data related to their child's English language proficiency level. By educating parents on such matters, the district hopes that more

parents will ask questions about how their child is being supported through the English learner programs. Piedad and the BPAC members also want to equip parents with the knowledge and skills necessary to ask questions about grades and report cards. They would like parents to develop a meaningful understanding of the Common Core State Standards and how their child is progressing in school. The district's goal is to see an increase of 10% more parent involvement per year. Piedad embraces and promotes a "can do" attitude towards family engagement and she believes this type of attitude towards working with families has led to her district's overall success in building collaborative relationships between families and educators.



*From left to right: Carlotta Ramirez, Leticia Chaidez, Fabiola Corral, Piedad Kaye from Mannheim District #83 in Franklin Park, IL, at the Illinois family engagement workshop presented by WIDA.*

## FINDING THE LEADER WITHIN: TWO PARENT LEADERS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES



Leticia Chaidez (top left) and Fabiola Corral (bottom left) currently hold leadership positions in the district's Bilingual Parent Advisory Council, or BPAC, as president and vice-president, respectively. Leticia is a mother of four sons, ages 7, 11, 16, and 18. She is a native of Durango, Mexico, and came to the United States 21 years ago with her husband. Her experience with schooling was all in Mexico; however, upon arriving in the U.S. she completed an ESL class at the local community college. Fabiola is a mother of two boys, ages 7 and 11. Fabiola is originally from San Luis Potosí, Mexico, and came to the United States 13 years ago

with her husband. Like Leticia, Fabiola's schooling experience was also in Mexico. Both Leticia and Fabiola have children enrolled in Mannheim School District #83 in Franklin Park, IL. Their children are English language learners and are in the district's transitional bilingual education program.

*I tell my children it's important to speak Spanish and my husband tells them it's important to be bilingual.*  
– Fabiola Corral

Language plays a key role in their bilingual families. The children in both families are exposed to Spanish at home because both families feel it is very important for their children to maintain their Spanish. Therefore, the use of English or Spanish changes depending on the family members involved in the discussion. Leticia and Fabiola are more comfortable speaking in Spanish, and both shared how they speak in Spanish to their children, while their husbands are more prone to speak in English with the children. Both moms spoke about their awareness of language loss. They know that their children are exposed to English for most of the day, and that they are receiving support in school to learn English. They are aware that their children are more comfortable communicating in English, but they are also aware that bilingualism is an asset in today's diverse society. They want their children to benefit from being bilingual. This motivates their interest in being informed on how their children are progressing in their language development.

*I don't want my children to lose their home language. So I mostly speak to them in Spanish. This is very important to me.*  
– Leticia Chaidez

As parents new to the U.S. school system, Leticia and Fabiola encountered challenges in understanding the different types of program models for English language learners. For example, as her eldest son moved through the grade levels, Fabiola noticed that the “bilingual program” changed and he was receiving more instruction in English than Spanish. Her understanding had been that this program was a “bilingual program,” so she assumed it would continue to provide her son instruction in both languages. However, the program is a transitional bilingual education program where the goal is to transition the children to English. She reached out to the school for an explanation of what was happening with her son's classes, and that is when they explained to her that the goal of the program is not to maintain Spanish, but to teach English. It became clear to her then that if she wanted her son to speak Spanish, it was her responsibility and not the school's.

*I learned that if I wanted my child to speak Spanish, it was my responsibility and not the school's. I thought it was a bilingual program where both languages were used.*  
– Fabiola Corral

Leticia spoke about the fact that often many parents have negative perceptions about bilingual education because they believe it will hold their children back. She argues that parents need to understand the benefits of bilingual education to both the student

and the families. Leticia feels that bilingual programs give families more opportunities to support students' learning because often the children are learning in Spanish. For families that only speak Spanish, this is a major support. Given their own experiences, and those of the parents they support, Leticia and Fabiola feel there is an urgent need to ensure that parents are aware of the different types of programs available for English language learners, the goals of the different programs, and how language is used for instruction.

*Parents need to feel that they're welcomed in their child's school.* – Leticia Chaidez

In regards to family engagement, Leticia and Fabiola believe that being physically present in the school is very important to teachers. They both feel that teachers value when parents attend school events and activities, participate in the PTA, or volunteer in the school. Both Leticia and Fabiola are frequent volunteers at their sons' schools. They volunteer because of the implicit messages they receive that volunteering is important. However, in their experience, it is not always easy to be physically present in the school—especially for families that do not speak English. Both Leticia and Fabiola shared about the fear they feel when they receive an English language notice about a school event. Language barriers are a major concern for families, and often this is what deters them from attending school events. Fabiola, for instance, attends some PTA events even though the events are held entirely in English and she herself speaks very little English, and therefore she does not truly feel like a part of the group. Leticia feels it is important for schools to be aware of how important it is to make sure that families feel like they are part of the group—especially if they are expected to be physically present at the schools.

Both Leticia and Fabiola engage in their children's education in a variety of ways. They provide emotional support at home and motivate their children to follow their dreams. They work hard to ensure that their children do not lose their home language. They assume parent leadership roles to support other families. They collaborate with district staff to ensure that the district's family engagement practices support student learning and the needs of families.

The collaborative project in Illinois and the interviews with Illinois participants provide a clear example of approaching family engagement from a systematic and assets-based view. It highlights the importance, at all levels, of listening to the needs of families and educators and responding to those needs through effective practices. We encourage readers to use these examples to reflect upon their own experiences with family engagement. What resources are available at the state, district, or school level to support local family engagement practices?

# Discussion Tool for School or District Teams: Developing a Shared Understanding of Family Engagement

As school communities change and evolve, so should family engagement practices. The purpose of this tool is to help school- or district-level teams engage in critical reflections and meaningful discussions on family engagement. This tool can help initiate discussions and capture data that can be used to support local family engagement practices focused on language learning.

## FORMING A TEAM

Family engagement at a school or district level is not a one-person job. It requires a team effort and that the voices of all stakeholders be heard. Remember, a key component of family engagement is strong relationships, so a team should be formed that could lead this work. The team should consist of parents, educators, administrators, parent liaisons, community members, and students.

### Who is on your school or district's family engagement team?

Parents:	Educators:
Administrators:	Parent Liaisons:
Community Members:	Students:

### The following guiding questions can be used to initiate discussions on local family engagement practices:

1. What does family engagement mean to us? How do we define it? What do schools expect from families, and what do families expect from schools? What do our students need?
2. What do we currently do that is focused specifically on the needs of English language learners and their families? How are we currently engaging with families to support students' language learning?
3. How can we work together to support the academic achievement and language development of English language learners?
4. What do families think we are doing well? Why do they feel this way?
5. What do educators think we are doing well? Why do they feel this way?
6. What types of information is shared with families? How is the information shared (e.g., newsletters, phone calls, web sites)? In which language(s) is information shared with families? Is the information shared with families meaningful to them?



# Discussion Tool for Families: Questions to ask your child's teacher

English language development is a process that takes time. For English language learners it is also a critical component of their academic achievement. Every year, English language learners are assessed on their English language proficiency. These scores are shared with teachers and families. It is important to know how your child is progressing in his/her English language development, and to know how his/her language learning is supported at school.

This tool provides parents information on their rights as parents of English language learners, as well as examples of questions parents should ask their child's teacher(s). We encourage families to use the following questions as a guide to engage with their child's teacher(s) in discussions about their child's English language development.

## KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

**Under federal policy, as a parent of an English language learner you have the right to be meaningfully informed of:**

- How and when your child was identified as an English language learner
- Your child's current level of English language proficiency
- Your right to accept or refuse language services
- What type of language support service, or language program, your child is entitled to receive
- How the language program will meet the needs of your child and help him/her achieve academically
- What the specific exit requirements are for exiting the language program

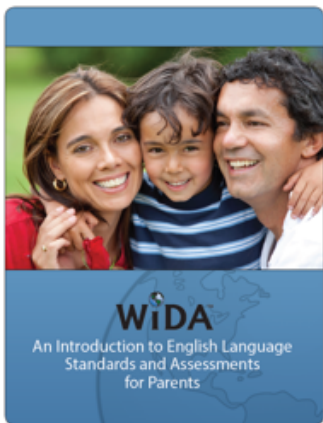
## QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S IDENTIFICATION AS AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER

1. When was my child screened for English language support?
2. Which assessment was used to screen my child?
3. What were my child's scores?
4. What type of language program or service do you recommended for my child?
5. What does my child need to do to exit the program?

## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER(S) ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

1. What are my child's most current scores in listening, speaking, reading, and writing?
2. Is my child making progress in his/her English language development?
3. What do you do to ensure he/she understands you and the work he/she needs to do?
4. Are all of my child's teachers aware of his/her language needs? If not, why not?
5. What can I do to support my child's English language development?

## Family Engagement Initiatives at WIDA



Our work with families and family engagement has influenced what we do at WIDA in many ways. First and foremost, the needs and experiences of families of English language learners have now become key considerations as we develop our resources. We find ourselves more frequently asking, *will this make sense to families?* For instance, we are taking into account feedback from families to help inform the design of new score reports for our assessments. Also, we explicitly included families, and the role they play in their child's education, in the revised Can Do Philosophy<sup>xx</sup> which was released in 2014. We are raising awareness with educators about the need to meaningfully communicate with families of English language learners and ensure that parents have the information they need to be active partners in their child's education. We are also developing other resources that could support school communities in their family engagement efforts focused on English language learners. For example, for the first time in the history of WIDA, we released a resource which focuses specifically on families of English language learners. *An Introduction to English Language Standards and Assessments for Parents*, the three-part webinar series initially developed for the Illinois project, was revised

and made available to all of our member states in October 2014. These webinars are available in English and Spanish on the WIDA website along with a handout for educators with helpful tips for face-to-face facilitation ([www.wida.us](http://www.wida.us)). This past year we learned a lot about working with families, but we know there is much more to learn and we look forward to it.

For more information on the family engagement initiatives at WIDA, please contact the WIDA Client Services Center at [help@wida.us](mailto:help@wida.us) or by phone at 1-866-276-7735.

WIDA specializes in the development of high-quality language standards and assessments used in early childhood and K-12 settings. To learn more about WIDA, visit [www.wida.us](http://www.wida.us)

### FOOTNOTES

<sup>i</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. (2014). *The condition of education 2014*. (Report No. NCES 2014083). Retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator\\_cgf.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgf.asp)

<sup>ii</sup> The term *school community* is used to refer to the students, families, teachers, administrators, and community members invested in the success of the school.

<sup>iii</sup> The term *families* is used to refer to parents, siblings, extended family members, and other adults who play a key role in the care, upbringing, and education of a child.

<sup>iv</sup> Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

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<sup>vi</sup> Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund and National Education Association. (2010). *Minority parent and community engagement: Best practices and policy recommendations for closing the gaps in student achievement*. Washington, DC: National Education Association.

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<sup>xv</sup> The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Pub. L. 107-110, Jan 8, 2002. Stat.115.1425-2094.

<sup>xvi</sup> To view the Illinois-specific webinars visit: <http://www.isbe.net/bilingual/htmls/ellparents.htm>

<sup>xvii</sup> The Illinois Family Engagement Framework can be accessed here: <http://www.isbe.net/family-engagement>

<sup>xviii</sup> Bilingual Parent Advisory Councils (BPAC) are described within the Illinois School Code which can be accessed here: <http://www.isbe.net/rules/archive/pdfs/228ARK.pdf>

<sup>xix</sup> To view information on the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs score reports, visit: <https://www.wida.us/assessment/ACCESS/>

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