

Connecticut PARAPROFESSIONALS' Guide to ELLs

CONNECTICUT



STATE DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION

Before making decisions regarding the appropriate role of paraprofessionals in providing support, schools and districts should examine how they are currently training, supervising, and evaluating their paraprofessionals.

Paraprofessionals play an integral role in student achievement and are invaluable resources in providing instructional support. Before making decisions regarding the appropriate role of paraprofessionals in providing such support, schools and districts should examine how they are currently training, supervising, and evaluating their paraprofessionals. The Connecticut *Guidelines for Training and Support of Paraprofessionals* was published and endorsed by the CSDE to inform and guide district personnel in the many important factors to consider in the use of paraprofessionals, specifically their training and roles and responsibilities and it also clarifies the paraprofessional role as it is related to instruction. The CSDE highly recommends that the Guidelines be used as the foundation for identifying appropriate roles for paraprofessionals within Bilingual and ESL education and support services. It is important that once these roles are identified, the paraprofessional continues to work under the direct supervision of a certified teacher and receive ongoing specialized training and professional development.

We welcome your comments and suggestions regarding this publication. Comments should be directed to Iris White, Bureau of Accountability and Improvement, at iris.white@ct.gov.

PARAPROFESSIONALS & THE INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT OF ENGLISH LEARNERS IN CT SCHOOLS

Connecticut's schools are becoming more culturally and linguistically diverse. According to data published by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) in July 2008, the population of English Language Learners (ELLs) in Connecticut schools had increased by 15.5 percent between 2003 and 2007. English Language Learners, as a percentage of all Connecticut students K-12, had increased from 4.6 percent to 5.4 percent (CSDE Data Bulletin, "English Language Learners in Connecticut," July 2008, p. 1). In the 2009-10 school year, 72,592 students spoke a dominant language other than English, and 133 dominant languages were spoken among these students. Of those students with dominant languages other than English, 29,993 were identified as ELLs (CSDE Data Bulletin, "English Language Learners, School year 2009-10," November 2010, p. 1). As our schools and children are becoming richer in their racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the CSDE and the State Education Resource Center (SERC) continue to offer support to districts, and have chosen to publish this document to provide guidance to districts, in their implementation of Bilingual and English as a Second Language (ESL) education and support services and in their use of paraprofessionals within these programs to provide instructional support to students who are ELLs.

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According to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and state law, school districts must identify and report the dominant language of ALL new K-12 students. The preliminary or initial determination of a student's dominant language is made through a home language survey given to parents/guardians at the point of registration/enrollment in the school district. The preliminary determination is also the first step in a three-step process to identifying English Language Learners.

Observations, interviews, testing, and a review of student records then serve to ascertain a student's dominant language and determine the English language proficiency of a student. It is important to remember that not all students who have a dominant language other

than English are English Language Learners. Only those students whose dominant language is one other than English AND whose English language proficiency is limited may be considered for identification as an ELL.

Once a child is identified as an ELL, parents/guardians must be notified and given program/service options available to their child. Parents/guardians have the right to accept, refuse, un-enroll, and re-enroll their child in any ESL/Bilingual program/service offered to their child. In cases where parents/guardians refuse programs/services, the child is still identified as an English Language Learner as a matter of law.

In school buildings where there are 20 or more ELLs of the same language group, a bilingual program must be provided by law (CGS, Section 10-17f). Connecticut's legislation on bilingual education has existed since 1977. According to the Bilingual Education Statute, eligible students may receive bilingual education for a maximum of 30 months. Those who receive bilingual education for 30 months without attaining the English mastery criteria must then be offered Language Transition Support Services (LTSS).

All identified English Language Learners remain ELL students until the time that they attain all of the exit criteria, or mastery standards, adopted by the Connecticut State Board of Education. ELL students must achieve both a linguistic and an academic mastery standard. They must achieve an overall level 4 or 5 on the Language Assessment Scales (LAS) Links in order to demonstrate English language proficiency and grade-level performance on the DRA, CMTs, or CAPT (depending on grade level) in order to demonstrate academic mastery.

PARAPROFESSIONALS' QUESTIONS REGARDING ESL AND BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Q: What are my responsibilities in designing and implementing instruction?

A: Paraprofessionals work under the direct supervision of teachers or other certified or licensed professionals. The ultimate responsibility for the design, implementation, and evaluation of instructional programs, including assessment of student's progress, is a collaborative effort of certified and licensed staff (CSDE, *Guidelines for Training and Support of Paraprofessionals*, 2008, p. 7).

Q: How long are students required to remain in Bilingual or ESL education and/or support services?

A: ELL students may remain in a Bilingual Education program for up to 30 months. After 30 months, if students have not attained the mastery criteria, they must be offered Language Transition Support Services (LTSS). There is no "time limit" on ESL support OR on a student's status as ELL. That is, a student remains an English Language Learner (ELL) until the time that he/she achieves all of the exit or mastery criteria required per the grade level of the student. ESL support should be appropriate to the student's instructional needs.

Q: What are my responsibilities in communicating student program/services and assessment information to other educators, i.e., teachers and other certified or licensed professionals?

A: Collaboration between paraprofessionals and teachers and other certified or licensed professionals is essential in the provision of an appropriate and effective education for English Language Learners. Paraprofessionals are key players in communicating relevant information and providing input to other educators in order to facilitate program and services planning, decision making, and problem solving, in addition to other activities decided upon by a team of educators. While paraprofessionals trained in the administration of the LAS Links may administer the test, score the test (which must be reviewed by the certified teacher), describe the test and its parts, and communicate results to other educators, the process of progress monitoring should be managed by teachers and certified and licensed professionals (CSDE, *Guidelines for Training and Support of Paraprofessionals*, 2008, p. 7, and SRBI Brief, “Paraprofessionals and SRBI,” Vol. 1, Issue 1, April 2010).

Q: What are my responsibilities in communicating with parents and families?

A: A paraprofessional’s responsibilities in communicating with parents and families usually depend on the policies and procedures of his/her district. At the same time, “paraprofessionals work under the direct supervision of teachers or other certified or licensed professionals” (CSDE, *Guidelines for Training and Support of Paraprofessionals*, 2008, p. 7). Therefore, a paraprofessional’s communications with parents and families should be supervised by teachers and/or other certified or licensed professionals.

SAMPLE ROLES FOR PARAPROFESSIONALS

Most ESL and Bilingual Education paraprofessionals provide either “push-in” and/or “pull-out” instructional support. In push-in instructional support, the paraprofessional goes into the classroom to provide linguistic and academic support to the student(s). In pull-out instructional support, the paraprofessional works with students outside of their regular classroom setting. In both contexts, paraprofessionals working in ESL programs support both students’ English language development and their access to and achievement in the general education curriculum. When working in Bilingual Education programs, they might also support the language development of the students’ first language.

Paraprofessionals in ESL and Bilingual Education programs assist both in making content (the “input”) comprehensible and in eliciting “output” from students by using specific instructional strategies that support students during the stages and processes of Second Language Acquisition. For that reason, it is extremely important that paraprofessionals be educated and experienced in, as well as receive on-going professional development on, the principles, stages, and processes of Second Language Acquisition; characteristics of ELL students; the LAS Links assessment; communication and collaboration with certified professionals and parents/families; and instructional strategies (e.g., differentiation strategies, sheltered instruction strategies, and strategies appropriate to specific content areas).

It should not be forgotten that in both “push-in” and “pull-out” contexts, paraprofessionals work under the direct supervision of teachers or other certified or licensed professionals, and that the ultimate responsibility for the design, implementation, and evaluation of instructional programs, including assessment of student progress, is a collaborative effort of certified and licensed staff (Ibid). Therefore, certified staff – in most cases, certified general education teachers and certified TESOL or Bilingual Education teachers; and, in some cases, additional certified professionals, including but not limited to reading instructors, integrated student support services professionals, and special education teachers – should be collaborating on the design and implementation of the instruction provided to English Language Learners in all contexts and settings. Such design and implementation includes initial assessment and identification, parent meetings and notification, program placement, daily instruction, progress monitoring, annual assessment, and reporting of scores and information for ELL students.

Professional Development Resources for PARAPROFESSIONALS

The CSDE professional development for paraprofessionals is coordinated by Iris White, Education Consultant, Bureau of Accountability and Improvement. The CSDE Consultant for Bilingual/ELL Education is Marie Salazar Glowski, also with the Bureau of Accountability and Improvement. Iris White can be contacted at iris.white@ct.gov or at 860-713-6794, and Marie Salazar Glowski can be contacted at marie.salazar.glowski@ct.gov or at 860-713-6750.

The **State Education Resource Center (SERC)** provides many professional development opportunities through its *Paraprofessionals as Partners* Initiative. Through a variety of diverse professional development opportunities, paraprofessionals working in collaborative partnerships with general and special education teachers and support services professionals can enhance and acquire skills to improve their ability to effectively provide instruction and other direct services to meet the needs of all students. SERC also coordinates an annual paraprofessional conference in the fall of each year. In addition, SERC offers professional development and technical assistance on topics relevant to educators working with English Language Learners.

For more information, contact Anthony Brisson, Consultant with SERC's Paraprofessionals as Partners Initiative, at brisson@ctserc.org or at 860-632-1485, ext. 315, or Maria Carillo, Consultant with SERC's *Initiative on Diversity in Education* at carillo@ctserc.org or at 860-632-1485, ext. 389. More information can also be found on SERC's Web site: www.ctserc.org.

The **Capitol Region Education Council (CREC)** also offers a variety of professional development and job opportunities for paraprofessionals and aspiring paraprofessionals, including a comprehensive, job-embedded professional development curriculum called *The Compass*. This series of training modules, aligned with the *National Paraprofessional Standards*, has been designed to enhance paraprofessionals' skills in working with students in educational settings. More information can be found on the paraprofessional page of the CREC Web site, www.crec.org/paraprofessional, or by contacting your local regional educational service center (RESA):

ACES: Patricia Hart-Cole, phart@aces.org

CES: Dr. Christine Peck, cpeck@ces.k12.ct.us

CREC: Donna Morelli, dmorelli@crec.org

EASTCONN: Jim Huggins, jhuggins@eastconn.org

EDUCATION CONNECTION: Jodiann Tenney, tenney@educationconnection.org

LEARN: Tracey LaMothe, tlamothe@learn.k12.ct.us



Connecticut State Department of Education
Bureau of Accountability and Improvement
165 Capitol Avenue, P.O. Box 2219, Hartford, CT 06145
Telephone: 860-713-6760 ♦ Fax: 860-713-7035