



**LAFAYETTE**  
PARISH SCHOOL SYSTEM

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# LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT (LEP)/ ESL STUDENTS

## Accommodating Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students

The “Limited English Proficient” (LEP) student is an individual who:

- a. Was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English;
- b. Comes from environments where a language other than English is dominant;
- c. Is an American Indian or Alaska native who comes from environments where a language other than English has had a significant impact on his/her level of English language proficiency;
- d. Has significant amount of difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language.

Limited English Proficient (LEP) students are not considered for 504 services based solely on the fact that they are acquiring English and are not yet proficient in the language. In fact, they are similar in most ways to students whose heritage language is English. They learn at different rates, have various interests and characteristics and different personalities and bring vast differences in background knowledge and experiences to the learning situation. All are unique. However, language and culture add other dimensions to their uniqueness. Problems may surface because these learners may use another language at home as they are learning English at school. Many cultural references, idiomatic expressions and multiple meanings or words that are known to most literate English-speaking students may be foreign to LEP students. An example might be the sign, “Fine for Loitering.” If the LEP student has learned the meaning for “fine” is “it is all right to do something,” the sign would convey an entirely different meaning than the idea of having to pay money for loitering. All of these concerns may cause barriers to learning.

Although such problems are typical for second language learners, they alone do not constitute a handicapping condition. Teachers must be able to recognize the stages of language acquisition and be able to make modifications for these students as they are acquiring English. The following page lists characteristics or behaviors educators may see in LEP students, but is not meant to be a complete list or indicate that LEP students are progressing in language development in the same way and at the same rate. Each student is unique and educators will need to consider the needs of each student individually.

Teachers must be flexible, willing to learn and grow, be able to adapt and accept LEP students, in addition to value others' language and cultures. Many cultures have an entirely different view of education, including the role of the teacher and the student, the environment for learning, and materials used.

**Characteristics of a beginning LEP student:**

The student may:

- Remain silent
- Be actively listening as he/she silently translates
- Not following directions
- Depend on body language, gestures or paralinguistics (words or phrases such as “huh?” “uh-unh,” and “uh-oh” usually accompanied by a facial expression and/or a gesture)
- Misinterpret body language or gestures
- Begin to imitate the verbalization of others by using single words or simple phrases
- Have limited school experiences
- Exhibit extremes of behavior: frustration, nervousness, fear, and self-consciousness
- Construct meaning from text primarily through non-print features (e.g., illustrations, graphs, maps, tables)
- Be able to generate simple texts that reflect their knowledge level of syntax (these texts may include a significant amount of non-conventional features, such as invented spelling, some grammatical inaccuracies, pictorial representations, surface features and rhetorical patterns of the native language)

**Characteristics of an intermediate LEP student:**

The student may:

- Make unsystematic and random language errors that may lead to misunderstanding
- Exhibit social language skills in English that exceed language abilities necessary for academic success
- Generate language to ask and answer questions without being able to expand or explain

- Exhibit limited but continuing progress in vocabulary, control of sentence structure, ability to read with comprehension and the ability to express ideas
- Require an extended period of time to translate information
- Require some repetition

**Characteristics of an advanced LEP student:**

The student may:

- Frequently choose to use more than one language to communicate
- Exhibit oral fluency but still lack higher level, content-specific language and writing skills
- Begin to apply reading and writing skills to acquire information in academic areas and real-life situations
- Read independently, but may have occasional comprehension problems, especially when concepts are presented in a decontextualized manner, when the sentences make inaccurate inferences from cultural, linguistic, and intellectual experiences
- Have difficulty understanding and using some idioms, figures of speech, and words with multiple meanings

**Students with Limited Formal Schooling**

Students with limited formal schooling (LFS) are generally recent arrivals to the United States whose backgrounds differ significantly from the school environment they are entering. This category includes students whose schooling has been interrupted for a variety of reasons, including war, poverty, or patterns of migration, as well as students coming from remote rural settings with little prior opportunity for sequential schooling.

The student with limited formal schooling may:

- Be pre- or semi-literate in their native language
- Have minimal understanding of the function of literacy
- Perform significantly below grade level
- Have a lack of awareness of the organization and culture of school

Although some students with limited formal schooling are at the beginning level of oral proficiency, some may have reached the intermediate level. Although not fully skilled in the

academic domain, these students possess invaluable life skills that can serve as a basis for academic learning.

--Taken from ESL Standards for Pre-K – 12 Students

## Strategies for Modifying Instruction for LEP Students

### Basic Information

- Beginners typically go through a “silent period” in which they receive language but are not ready to speak. This “silent period” may last between two months to two years.
- It may take six to nine years for students learning English as a second language to become as fluent in academic English as native speakers.
- A negative affective filter will delay the progress of language and literacy learning. Limited English Proficient students need a supportive environment in which they feel free to take risks to learn the second language.
- They need comprehensible, meaningful input to learn English. Visuals, gestures, and experiential learning help to provide a context which makes input meaningful.
- The progress of these students should be measured over time.
- It is the responsibility of all educational personnel to instruct LEP students, not just the English as a Second Language teacher.
- To hold LEP students directly accountable for the same criteria as their native English speaking peers not only poses an impossible task for many of them, but may violate their civil rights.
- A variety of assessment practices, including alternative assessment, provides a clear picture of student progress.
- As students learn English as a second language, written or oral evaluations should focus on the communication of ideas and process rather than on technical exactness.
- High expectations are important; students should set goals and teachers should set tasks that are slightly higher than what seems possible without penalizing students if they are not able to meet these expectations. Just as students should reach and take risks, teachers should give credit for attempts even though they may fall short of what non-LEP students can do.

### Suggestions for Modifying Instruction

- When modifying objectives, teachers should determine what is reasonable for a particular student at the student’s level of language acquisition. For example, if the student is still in the “silent period,” it is not realistic to expect that student to give a speech to the class.

- Teachers may consider using an alternative or supplemental text which offers information related to the same objectives, but provides simplified language or greater context, visual support, etc.
- Teach key vocabulary which is essential to understanding the lesson. Strategies which involve visual and kinesthetic engagement, as well as examples and analogies, may be useful.
- Modifications in assessment/evaluation may include the use of literal level questions until the student is able to handle more complex language, the assignment of open book tests, oral assessment, teacher-made rather than publisher evaluations, the use of projects over papers.
- Assign peer buddies or place students in a cooperative learning group where students are willing to assist him/her.
- Use visuals, chalk talk and concrete examples. Tape record lectures and other oral presentations so the LEP students can listen later.
- Read aloud or have another student read aloud. If available, have the student listen to audio cassettes of texts while reading.
- Use content-based videos to help reinforce curriculum.
- Give LEP students photocopies of difficult texts to facilitate translations and notes.
- Preview vocabulary and encourage LEP students to look up words in their bilingual dictionaries prior to reading.

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Charleston County School District

75 Calhoun Street, Charleston, SC 29401