

Guidance for Authorizers: Strategies for Recruiting and Retaining Special Populations

Your role, as an authorizer, is to encourage charter schools to enroll, recruit, and retain educationally disadvantaged students¹. This means that throughout the course of a charter term, you should monitor whether a school is making annual progress toward meeting the enrollment plan outline in its charter, as well whether a school has demonstrated that it has made extensive good faith efforts to attract, recruit, and retain such students.

Below, you will find examples of strategies that schools can employ to attract and retain English Language Learners and students with disabilities. Many of these strategies can be utilized across the other categories of educationally disadvantaged students.

English Language Learners²:

- Engage local community leaders, human service agencies, administrators, educational entities, and other organizations in the recruitment process.
- Disseminate information in multiple languages using local papers, websites, student organizations with presence in non-English speaking communities, and all other avenues of communication.
- Offer assistance with admission, registration, financial aid and other related issues for students who may have increased difficulty navigating the enrollment process due to both language barriers and unfamiliar cultural contexts.
- Include pictures of diverse individuals in recruitment materials.
- Advertise where members of the community congregate. Ask to distribute marketing material to employers that may hire a large amount of individuals who qualify as LEP.
- Examine high traffic areas in the community and distribute materials there, especially in places where individuals may qualify as English Language Learners and other special populations. (For example, grocery stores, local clinics, community assistance organizations, and churches.)
- Revise school policies to be friendly to undocumented immigrants.
- Release a statement of support for undocumented students.
- Ensure that enrollment forms include language to make clear the Social Security numbers are not required.

¹ Educationally disadvantaged students include the following subgroups: English language learners, students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, migrant students, neglected or delinquent students, and homeless students.

²Source: <https://icsps.illinoisstate.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/LEP-Recruit-and-retention-1.pdf>

Students with Disabilities³:

- Examine the possibility of using alternative instructional strategies to increase learner persistence in the program.
- Create a challenging, non-stigmatizing learning environment that meets individual learners' needs, including robust early intervention programs.
- Provide learner support programs such as group discussions, individual meetings, active mentoring, core academic support, and other community service activities.
- Implement comprehensive retention initiatives to target at-risk learners that include orientation and peer-mentoring programs.
- Send introductory letters to all families and inform them of available support services (i.e., childcare, transportation, and disability services).
- Engage in the process of determining what accommodations are needed to achieve successful retention.
- Offer support services that include: counseling services, reading remediation, tutoring, attendance monitoring, or after-school clubs.
- Provide professional development for instructors and advise staff to allow them to provide better service to students with disabilities.
- Provide incentives to make use of the knowledge base on instructing and serving students with disabilities.

While the strategies above are simply a starting point, our hope is that they provide a framework for charter schools to consider as they make efforts to recruit, attract, and retain educationally disadvantaged students.

³ Source: <https://icsps.illinoisstate.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Disabilities-recruit-and-retention-1.pdf>