California Department of Education

Observation Protocol for Teachers of English Learners
User Guide

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Introduction

In July 2017, the California State Board of Education (SBE) unanimously approved the [California English Learner Roadmap State Board of Education Policy: Educational Programs and Services for English Learners (EL Roadmap Policy)](). The policy affirmed the following vision and mission for the success of English learner (EL) students in California.

Vision

EL students fully and meaningfully access and participate in a twenty-first century education from early childhood through grade twelve that results in their attaining high levels of English proficiency, mastery of grade-level standards, and opportunities to develop proficiency in multiple languages.

Mission

California schools affirm, welcome, and respond to a diverse range of EL student strengths, needs, and identities. California schools prepare graduates with the linguistic, academic, and social skills and competencies they require for college, career, and civic participation in a global, diverse, and multilingual world, thus ensuring a thriving future for California.

User Guide Context

Reclassification marks the transition from EL status to Fluent English Proficient (RFEP) status and is a significant milestone with far-reaching implications for California's 1.1 million EL students. Reclassification may affect the types of educational supports and services that students receive as well as their educational environment and opportunities.

In November 2023, the California SBE unanimously approved the Observation Protocol for Teachers of English Learners (OPTEL) for use as a statewide tool to standardize reclassification Criterion 2, teacher evaluation, and Criterion 3, parent consultation. **The OPTEL's power lies in its potential to enhance teaching and learning and to give families a central voice in their children's education**.

In California, educators provide valuable insight into students' readiness for reclassification by providing an evaluation of students' English language proficiency (ELP) to inform whether students will be reclassified to RFEP. Using the OPTEL, educators can provide complementary evidence of students' interactive language use in the classroom that may not be captured by summative ELP assessments. The OPTEL provides an important opportunity for educators who are familiar with their students to meaningfully participate in the reclassification process.

The OPTEL was developed to support educators by providing a statewide standardized tool that has been validated and approved for use, removing the need for local educational agencies (LEAs) to develop or source their own tools or processes for educators to evaluate students' ELP. **This standardization will support more equitable evaluation of students' ELP across the state.** Additionally, the tool was designed to support teachers of EL students in deepening their understanding of their students' ELP skills and areas for growth to inform instruction. The tool also supports educators engaging in conversations with EL students' parents or guardians about their child's progress in ELP and readiness for reclassification.

This User Guide is designed to support educators using the OPTEL tool to observe and evaluate EL students' ELP. The OPTEL supports many uses, including informing decisions regarding student reclassification to RFEP. This guide is designed to provide educators with the information they need to:

- understand the purpose of the OPTEL and how the OPTEL benefits teachers and students;

- use the OPTEL to document information about EL students' ELP as they use English in the classroom;

- use information collected with the OPTEL to inform reclassification decisions for EL students; and

- use information collected using the OPTEL in discussions with parents[1] about EL students' progress in ELP, including reclassification decisions.

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[1] Throughout this document, the terms *parent* and *parents* are intended to be inclusive of parents and/or guardians.

This OPTEL User Guide is structured as follows:

- Overview of the purpose of the OPTEL

- Guidance for interpreting the OPTEL Performance Level Descriptors

- Guidance for how to set up instruction to use the OPTEL to observe students and to determine their OPTEL receptive and expressive ELP levels

- Guidance for purposeful navigation of the OPTEL and for ease of use, including use for formative assessment, for reclassification decisions, and
in parent consultations

- A detailed review of the OPTEL structure

- Common questions and accompanying answers regarding the use of the OPTEL

As you review the OPTEL User Guide, make sure to have a copy of the [OPTEL tool](#) to refer to.

OPTEL Purpose

The OPTEL was designed to support a standardized, equitable reclassification process across the state of California. In California there are four reclassification criteria used to determine whether an EL student has sufficient ELP to exit from EL programs and services and to be reclassified as an RFEP student. The four reclassification criteria, as specified in California *Education Code (EC)* Section 313, are as follows:

Criterion 1: Assessment of ELP using an objective assessment instrument. The English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) constitute the required state assessments for ELP administered to students whose primary language is a language other than English. LEAs must use the Summative ELPAC results as the primary assessment of ELP. LEAs shall use the Overall Performance Level (PL) 4 as the determination that a student has met the ELP criterion. The Summative Alternate ELPAC is the state test for ELP for students with the most

significant cognitive disabilities. LEAs shall use Summative Alternate ELPAC Overall PL 3 (Fluent English Proficient) as the Alternate ELP criterion.

Criterion 2: Teacher evaluation, including, but not limited to, a review of the pupil's curriculum mastery.

Criterion 3: Parental opinion and consultation.

Criterion 4: Comparison of the performance of the pupil in basic skills against an empirically established range of performance in basic skills based upon the performance of English proficient peers of the same age that demonstrates whether the pupil is sufficiently proficient in English to participate effectively in a curriculum designed for pupils of the same age whose native language is English.

Together, these four criteria inform whether an EL student will continue to receive EL programs and services or will be reclassified to RFEP.

The OPTEL was developed to support the implementation of the second criterion, teacher evaluation, and the third criterion, parental opinion and consultation. The OPTEL is a standardized observation protocol developed for use by teachers in evaluating a student's ELP to meet the requirements of *EC* Section 313.3. California legislation outlines that the protocol should be designed:

- to be used by teachers to evaluate a student's use of English while the student is engaging in academic core content learning, including interactive language use with peers;

- to allow teachers to assess language practices across a range of proficiency levels in order to help teachers identify students' performance along the continuum of progress toward proficiency in English;

- to be used for all EL students, including those with disabilities who have individualized education programs (IEPs) or Section 504 Plans and who take the Summative ELPAC;[2]

- to be used by core content area teachers at all grade levels, English language development (ELD) teachers, bilingual teachers, and special education teachers; and

- to be easily used by educators.

As such, the OPTEL is designed to be used by a range of different educators across the population of EL students who take the Summative ELPAC. The OPTEL is also

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[2] The OPTEL has not been validated for use with students who take the Summative Alternate ELPAC.

designed to be used as a formative assessment tool to support student progress toward ELP as well as in consultation with parents of EL students regarding their progress toward ELP to support Criterion 3.

Through a rigorous development and field-testing process, the OPTEL has been designed and validated for use in supporting educators in monitoring EL students' English receptive (listening and reading) and expressive (speaking and writing) language use in the classroom. The OPTEL provides educators with a standardized protocol for evaluating their EL students' ELP skills and growth. As a result, the OPTEL supports educators' ability to design instruction that meets their students' needs and to determine when a student is ready for reclassification. Additionally, the introduction of a standardized tool, rather than the use of many tools or processes across the state, has the potential to support more equitable evaluation of student ELP and, in turn, inform reclassification decision-making processes that are more equitable. The OPTEL was designed to be easy to navigate and use, and it is aligned with California's ELD Standards and the ELPAC Performance Level Descriptors to support aligned instruction and assessment.

Interpreting the OPTEL Performance Level Descriptors

There are four performance levels on the OPTEL instrument (Level 1 Emerging, Level 2 Early–Mid Expanding, Level 3 Late Expanding–Early Bridging, and Level 4 Mid–Late Bridging). These performance levels are aligned with both the ELPAC Performance Level Descriptors and the California ELD Standards Proficiency Level Descriptors. The frequency terms used in the performance descriptors (*rarely*, *sometimes*, *often*, *consistently*) are intended to describe EL student performance as compared to general expectations of a RFEP, grade-level peer. It is not expected that teachers will compute or tally the number of instances of student performance on receptive and expressive skills but rather consider how the student performs overall across multiple classroom interactions, tasks, and assignments. The extent terms for levels of support provided to EL students for them to engage in rigorous, grade-level work (*substantial*, *moderate*, *light*, *minimal*) are aligned with the California ELD Standards Proficiency Level Descriptors General Extent of Support, as seen in Table 1.

> For all the OPTEL performance levels, it is expected that EL students are engaging in grade-level learning with relevant, rigorous, grade-level texts and topics. What changes for students across the ELP levels, and their level as marked on the OPTEL, is the extent of support needed for them to understand and communicate in English.

For example, at early levels of English proficiency, students may need extensive visual support and key vocabulary provided along with models of sentence structures. At all

levels, the extent of support will vary depending on the context and nature of the task—students will need less linguistic support during activities with familiar topics or routines and more support during activities with new, complex topics or a newly introduced type of task. Note that even at the Bridging level, comprising Levels 3 and 4 on the OPTEL, students who need occasional light support to access particularly complex topics, texts, and tasks are still eligible for consideration as RFEP status. This includes students with an IEP who may be receiving accommodations determined appropriate by an IEP team to meet needs associated with their disability. These accommodations do not alter the curriculum content or rigor of instruction but are put in place to facilitate access to the grade-level curriculum. OPTEL users should review each student's IEP and consult with their Education Specialist regarding accommodations within the IEP, including frequency, duration, and in which settings the accommodations should be implemented. OPTEL users should also consult with the Education Specialist on how the student's disability may be impacting their ELP.

The boxes on the right-hand side of the OPTEL instrument—for noting instructional setting, interaction type, and documentation supporting the level selected—provide educators with a way to capture and record contextual information based on a single observation or a series of observations of students across a school semester or year.

Table 1 provides an overview of how the OPTEL levels align with the ELPAC Performance Levels and the California ELD Standards Proficiency Level Descriptors.

California ELD Standards Proficiency Levels:

- Students at the early stages of the **Emerging level** can engage in complex, cognitively demanding social and academic activities requiring language when provided substantial linguistic support; as they develop more familiarity and ease with understanding and using English, support may be moderate or light for familiar tasks or topics.
- Students at the early stages of the **Expanding level** can engage in complex, cognitively demanding social and academic activities requiring language when provided moderate linguistic support; as they develop increasing ease with understanding and using English in a variety of contexts, support may be light for familiar tasks or topics.
- Students at the early stages of the **Bridging level** can engage in complex, cognitively demanding social and academic activities requiring language when provided light linguistic support; as they develop increasing ease with understanding and using highly technical English, support may not be necessary for familiar tasks or topics using everyday English.

Table 1. Alignment of OPTEL Levels with California ELD Standards Proficiency Levels and ELPAC Performance Levels

OPTEL Level	ELPAC Performance Level	California ELD Standards Proficiency Level (General Extent of Support)
Level 1 (Emerging: substantial linguistic support needed to engage in grade-level learning)	**Level 1** EL students at this level have minimally developed oral (listening and speaking) and written (reading and writing) English skills.	**Emerging**
Level 2 (Early–Mid Expanding: moderate linguistic support needed to engage in grade-level learning)	**Level 2** EL students at this level have somewhat developed oral (listening and speaking) and written (reading and writing) English skills.	**Expanding**
Level 3 (Late Expanding–Early Bridging: light linguistic support needed to engage in grade-level learning)	**Level 3** EL students at this level have moderately developed oral (listening and speaking) and written (reading and writing) English skills.	Expanding or Bridging
Level 4 (Mid–Late Bridging: minimal linguistic support needed to engage in grade-level learning)	**Level 4** EL students at this level have well-developed oral (listening and speaking) and written (reading and writing) English skills.	Bridging

Note. The full set of the Summative ELPAC General Performance Level Descriptors is available on the CDE website. The full set of the California ELD Standards Proficiency Level Descriptors can be found on pages 20–24 of the *California English Language Development Standards (Electronic Edition) Kindergarten through Grade 12* (2014).

Setting Up Instruction to Use the OPTEL

The OPTEL instrument is designed for educators to capture information on the extent to which EL students use English language receptive and expressive skills in the classroom while engaged in academic content learning. **For students to exhibit these skills, teachers need to design classroom settings and instructional activities that provide their EL students with multiple opportunities to use language while engaged in rigorous, grade-level activities.** Students must be invited to interact with content and their peers, express themselves orally and in writing, and understand and react to their teachers' and classmates' communication as well as written and recorded content materials.

Several resources available from the CDE provide detailed descriptions and illustrations of what such instructional settings and activities look like at all grade levels and for all students, with a focus on EL students:

- *English Language Arts/English Language Development (ELA/ELD) Framework*
  The *ELA/ELD Framework* is a comprehensive resource for interpreting the ELA/Literacy and ELD standards and developing high-quality curricula, instruction, and assessments aligned with the standards. A chapter for each grade level or grade span, Transitional Kindergarten through grade twelve, provides detailed sections on content and pedagogy, including themes such as meaning making and effective expression, which are particularly relevant for using the OPTEL instrument.

- Implementation Support for the ELA/ELD Framework
  To support implementation of the framework, the CDE has curated resources, organized by grade span and by framework theme categories, that include written and video examples of well-designed classroom activities that invite students to actively use their English language skills in a way that is visible to teachers.

- Integrated and Designated ELD Video Series
  This video series shows teachers engaging EL students in content area learning and ELD lessons related to that content. Classroom examples are from a range of grade levels, transitional kindergarten through grade twelve, and a range of content areas, including ELA, math, science, and social studies.

- *Improving Education for Multilingual and English Learner Students: Research to Practice*
  This publication presents current evidence-based pedagogy and practices in the areas of multilingual development, early education, assets-based environments, ELD, and the creation of systems that support the implementation of these practices. It also provides a deeper dive into accessing actionable examples of how evidence-based pedagogy and practices may be implemented in districts/charters, schools, and classrooms to positively impact multilingual and EL students.

- *California Practitioners' Guide for Educating English Learners with Disabilities*
  This guide provides information on identifying, assessing, supporting, and reclassifying EL students who may qualify for special education services and students with disabilities who may be classified as EL students (dually identified students). The guide can also assist leaders in developing and implementing policies and practices related to dually identified students. Section 3, Educational Programs and Instructional Strategies, and Section 5, Reclassification from EL Status, contain information that is particularly relevant for using the OPTEL with dually identified students.

- California ELD Standards
  The California ELD Standards amplify the California State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (ELA/Literacy). The California ELD Standards, when used in tandem with state content standards, assist EL students in building ELP and refining the academic use of English, and they provide students access to subject area content.

- California EL Roadmap
  This web page contains links to the EL Roadmap Policy and accompanying guidance. The web page also includes illustrative case examples and other resources. The OPTEL is designed to support LEAs in aligning policy and practice with the four principles, including the creation of system conditions that support effectiveness and the promotion of alignment and articulation within and across systems.

Implementation Guidance

This section provides guidance for implementing the OPTEL. It includes:

- an overview of how the OPTEL can be used in the classroom;

- guidance about how the OPTEL can be used for formative assessment purposes;

- guidance about how the OPTEL can be used in reclassification decisions; and

- guidance about how the OPTEL can be used in parent consultations.

How the OPTEL Can Be Used in the Classroom

The OPTEL is designed for teachers to capture and record their observations of EL students' ELP while the students are engaged in academic content learning in the classroom. The OPTEL tool is designed for ease of use by teachers of all content areas and is aligned with the California ELD Standards to support standardized, consistent evaluation of students' ELP skills. It can be used as a formative assessment to collect information on student progression in ELP throughout a semester or school year. Information gathered on formative OPTEL observations serves a dual purpose. It can both inform ongoing integrated and designated ELD instructional strategies and contribute to reclassification decisions for EL students.

> The OPTEL does not prescribe when, how, or how often teachers should conduct observations. These decisions are locally determined. However, it is important to use the OPTEL to frequently monitor EL students' ELP progress to support appropriate reclassification timing and inform instruction. Additionally, it may be beneficial to include observations performed by multiple educators in different contexts, as a single observation in one content area may not fully capture students' English language use.

The OPTEL is designed to be used during typical instruction and does not require a special lesson or setting to be completed. Several examples of ways teachers could use the instrument are listed below:

- Small groups of students are discussing a set of questions about a text they have just read. The teacher walks around the classroom and takes notes on the discussions at each table. Later, the teacher marks an OPTEL instrument for each of the EL students in the classroom based on their contributions to the discussion: receptive skills for reading comprehension and expressive skills for speaking, as related to the text they had read and questions they discussed.

- As a culminating task for a unit of study, a student writes a report and gives an oral presentation of that report. After the written report is turned in and the oral presentation is completed, the teacher marks the OPTEL instrument for that student: expressive skills for speaking and writing based on the report and presentation.

- Students watch a video on a content area topic and individually complete a graphic organizer of the main ideas and details explained in the video. Based on the graphic organizer, the teacher marks an OPTEL instrument for EL students' receptive skills for listening and expressive skills for vocabulary in writing.

- Pairs of students take turns explaining a key idea in a text they have read. Each student in the pair must then report out to the class their partner's explanation.

The teacher marks an OPTEL instrument for the EL student's receptive skills in reading based on the student's own explanation and for receptive skills in listening based on the student's report of their partner's explanation.

- Kindergarten students rotate through small groups, one of which is set up for them to share with the group how they solved a math problem and ask questions or discuss their thinking. The teacher marks an OPTEL instrument for each of the EL students in the classroom based on their expressive skills for speaking as they share their reasoning and their receptive skills for their listening and engagement in the discussion.

How the OPTEL Can Be Used for Formative Assessment Purposes

In addition to its use in the reclassification process, the OPTEL can be used for formative assessment of EL students' ELP.

As defined in the *ELA/ELD Framework*, formative assessment is a deliberate process used by teachers with students during instruction that provides actionable feedback that the teacher uses to adjust teaching and learning strategies to improve students' attainment of learning targets and goals. Formative assessment is a process, not a test. The components of the formative assessment process are as follows:

1. Clarify intended learning.
2. Elicit evidence.
3. Interpret evidence.
4. Act on evidence.

The OPTEL can be used to help interpret evidence gathered on EL students' use of English in the classroom. Teachers can use the OPTEL to determine their EL students' ELP during a classroom activity and adjust the current lesson or follow lesson plan based on the students' level in receptive and/or expressive skills. Teachers can also compare OPTEL ratings over time to monitor students' progress in ELP on an ongoing basis, both for planning instruction and for communicating with the parent(s) of the student. IEP teams can also use the OPTEL as a progress-monitoring tool and to support the development of present levels for annual/triennial IEPs for dually identified students.

For more information on formative assessment for EL students, educators can consult Chapter 8 of the *ELA/ELD Framework*. A detailed description of short-cycle formative assessment can be found on pages 829–834, and an explanation of assessment of ELD progress is on pages 850–858.

How the OPTEL Can Be Used for Informing Reclassification Decisions

As noted above, one intended function of the OPTEL is to provide teacher input to inform reclassification decisions. Prior to the OPTEL's development, LEAs needed to determine which tool or processes to use to collect teacher input to fulfill this criterion.

Now that it has been approved by the California SBE, the OPTEL is a standardized, statewide tool that can be used across all districts and classrooms.

The OPTEL is designed to support educators by making it easier to provide input into students' reclassification decisions and to create consistent evaluation practices across the state to support equitable opportunities for EL students. The OPTEL tool does so by providing a tested, validated tool that was designed to be aligned with California ELD Standards and assessments and to be easily used during classroom instruction.

> **Ideally, using the OPTEL for reclassification Criterion 2 need not require any additional effort or planning beyond using the tool for formative purposes to support instruction throughout the school year. In other words, educators who design instruction that allows students to use language in the classroom on a regular basis will have opportunities to observe their students and collect OPTEL ratings throughout the year and are encouraged to do so.** This approach of integrating OPTEL use into regular instructional planning and decision-making will also make it easier for schools to reclassify students throughout the school year as evidence from other reclassification criteria becomes available.

In practice, educators may still find it helpful to be strategic about which students to observe and when to observe them to ensure that students who are close to reclassification have OPTEL ratings ready to contribute to these decisions. The following suggestions may be helpful in supporting the OPTEL's use for reclassification purposes:

- **Identify students who have already met their ELPAC or basic skills criteria for reclassification and prioritize observing these students as soon as possible once they are identified.** As a reminder, students can and should be reclassified at any point during the school year immediately upon meeting the four reclassification criteria. Students must have an overall score of Performance Level (PL) 4 on the ELPAC or PL 3 on the Alternate ELPAC[3] to meet Criterion 1. The test and thresholds for the basic skills criterion (Criterion 4) are set locally and may vary by grade level.

- **Identify students who came close to meeting their ELPAC or basic skills criteria in the most recent testing cycle and make a point to observe and rate these students at least once before the next testing opportunity.** Students who scored an overall PL 3 on the ELPAC or PL 2 on the Alternate ELPAC in the previous year's administration may make progress during the current school year such that they meet the criteria for these assessments in the next testing cycle. Similarly, students who score near the threshold on their locally determined basic skills assessment may also make progress that brings them up to the threshold. Observing these students with the OPTEL between tests can also help educators identify students' strengths and weaknesses and support their continued improvement toward reclassification.

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[3] The OPTEL has not been validated for use with students who take the Alternate ELPAC.

> The following tips may also be helpful in supporting OPTEL use for reclassification:

- The OPTEL and the ELPAC measure different language skills in different ways. Scores will not necessarily align.

- Students need only one official OPTEL rating as evidence for Criterion 2. Content area teachers at all grade levels, ELD teachers, bilingual teachers, and special education teachers may provide this rating. **However, there is instructional value in having different teachers observe students in different settings and at different points during the year.** Ideally, a student's OPTEL rating for reclassification should be based on neither their first nor their only time being observed.

- The _ELPAC Information Guide_ and the _California Practitioners' Guide for Educating English Learners with Disabilities_ provide guidance and examples for making reclassification decisions for dually identified students. For updated guidance on domain exemptions, see the ELPAC Information Guide.

How the OPTEL Can Be Used in Parent Consultations

The completed OPTEL can be used for parent consultations either in the context of a consultation focused on a student's reclassification decision or as part of a consultation focused more broadly on student growth and performance. As noted earlier, the term _parent_ is used to be inclusive of a parent, parents, a guardian, or guardians. **The completed OPTEL can be used as evidence to share with parents that documents their child's receptive and expressive ELP skills, although it should be shared as one piece of evidence among others.**

Per CDE guidance, LEAs should continue using parental opinion and consultation per local policy to establish reclassification procedures for connecting with families of EL students to answer questions, discuss student performance on each reclassification criterion, and set goals for the next school year. Parental consultation and opinion, not consent, is required per _EC_ Section 313(f)(3).

LEAs are encouraged to think broadly about bringing together individuals for an informed discussion on reclassification decisions for students. For EL students who score at Summative ELPAC Overall PL 4 or Summative Alternate ELPAC Overall PL 3, LEAs are encouraged to convene interested parties (including the student's current teachers, their teachers from the previous school year, and relevant academic coordinators) to discuss the eligible student's performance and recommend goals for the next school year. These consultations should lead to a reclassification discussion that is held prior to decisions and that includes parents. The discussion should yield collaboratively developed ideas, plans, and decisions for any change in classification and supports to be provided during the four-year monitoring period that is required for students who have been reclassified to RFEP status. **Importantly, failure to obtain a parent signature on the OPTEL shall not preclude a student from being reclassified.**

For students who do not score at Summative ELPAC Overall PL 4 or Summative Alternate ELPAC Overall PL 3, a parent consultation may still provide an important opportunity to connect with a student's parent(s) to discuss the student's ELP growth and performance.

> **Parent consultations focused on students' ELP should be anchored by multiple evidence pieces, including the completed OPTEL. The completed OPTEL can be used as evidence to share with parents that documents their child's receptive and expressive ELP skills, although it should be shared as one piece of evidence among others.**

Educators may want to structure parent consultations in the following way:

- Discuss the student's EL status and ELP to ground the conversation in a shared understanding of the roles that EL status and ELP assessment play in a student's education, including an overview of the types of evidence that are considered when determining a student's EL status.

- Share the OPTEL tool and provide an overview of it in a language the parents understand, highlighting the difference between receptive and expressive language skills, as well as highlighting the differences between performance levels.

- Use the information recorded on the tool (setting, interaction type, any accommodations or impact due to a student's disability) to share the context for how one or more observations were conducted.

- Share the level recorded for the student's receptive skills using the statements under the performance level to expand on the meaning behind the level.

- Share what was recorded in the box "What did you consider that led you to mark this level?" and any additional documentation for the student's receptive skill level.

- Share the level recorded for the student's expressive skills, using the statements under the performance level to expand on the meaning behind the level.

- Share what was recorded in the box "What did you consider that led you to mark this level?" and any additional documentation for the student's expressive skill level.

- If a prior completed OPTEL is available, discuss any changes from the prior administration of the OPTEL, whether it was earlier in the year or in a prior year.

- Discuss how the OPTEL is a single piece of evidence on the student's ELP and discuss all other pieces of evidence that are relevant.

- Connect the student's OPTEL ratings to their ELPAC and basic skills assessment results and identify how these scores inform the instruction, supports, and goals as well as reclassification decisions for the student.

LEAs must provide effective language assistance to parents to facilitate full access to the OPTEL and its implications for their children. The OPTEL tool must be provided to parents and guardians of EL students in a language they can understand. For more information on the rights of parents and guardians of EL students, educators can consult the U.S. Department of Education Information Bulletin for Limited English Proficient Parents and Guardians and for Schools and School Districts that Communicate with Them. Additional Office of Civil Rights (OCR) guidance for LEA obligations to EL students and their parents and guardians is available on the OCR web page.

> **Access issues should not be a justification for failing to connect with parents.** LEAs can think strategically about connecting with parents, including through alternative means (for example, direct phone calls, one-on-one conferences) if needed. LEAs can reach out to parents of all students eligible for reclassification to consult via phone, virtual school platforms, or other technology that is available to parents in order to give parents the opportunity to discuss progress and data or to voice any concerns and questions about their child's likely reclassification.

In the event the consultation happens via a phone call or virtual video call, an electronic signature on the OPTEL form is appropriate and allowed, while noting that a signature is not necessary for a student to be reclassified to RFEP.

For discussions focused on reclassification decisions, educators should also focus on the information that makes the student eligible; any necessary supports for the student to succeed in rigorous, grade-level learning; and how to monitor and meet these needs via the monitoring process. It can be productive to ensure that parent consultations involve everyone who knows and will be supporting the student in the coming school year—parents, decision-makers, and all relevant teachers and support staff—in order to address parent questions about how the school's instructional environments and supports will continue to benefit the student's academic success. Hearing parent concerns, responding to parent questions, and then collaboratively identifying strategies to address those questions constitute an appropriate use of parent consultation time.

The following resources may support parent consultations:

- *English Learner Toolkit, Chapter 10: Ensuring Meaningful Communication with Limited English Proficient Parents*
  This toolkit helps state educational agencies and LEAs meet their obligations to EL students.

- *Family Engagement Framework*
  This framework provides guidance for educators, districts/charters, schools, families, and communities as they plan, implement, and evaluate strategies across multiple programs for effective family engagement to support student achievement.

- *Family Engagement Toolkit: Continuous Improvement Through an Equity Lens*
  This toolkit provides information and resources to support LEAs in integrating family engagement with each district's or charter's student learning goals.

- Resources for Parents of Multilingual Students
  This CDE web page is a centralized location for parents of multilingual students to access information and learn about the different resources available through the Multilingual Support Division, other divisions within the CDE, and external organizations. The goal of this web page is to connect parents of multilingual students to critical information to help them navigate the California education system. This page also aims to equip parents with important information to empower themselves to play an active role in their child's education. The resources here may support educators in their consultations with parents.

Implementation Guidance Summary

To summarize, the OPTEL was designed to support educators in a number of ways. **The OPTEL provides a standardized tool to support educators in providing input on students' readiness for reclassification, in designing instruction to support students' ELP growth, in engaging in formative assessment practices, in providing constructive feedback to EL students about their ELP and academic progress and goals, and in connecting with parents through consultations focused on students' ELP growth.**

While the OPTEL is a standardized tool, there are many flexibilities in how it can be used. The OPTEL can be used at any time of the year, and it is recommended that the OPTEL be used multiple times throughout the year. The OPTEL can be used by teachers across core content areas, including ELD teachers and teachers who teach in special education settings. It may be beneficial to have multiple teachers across content areas complete an OPTEL form for an individual student to provide different perspectives on students' ELP. There is no required length of time to complete the OPTEL and no requirement that it be completed during a single lesson. The OPTEL is designed to complement local policies and practices regarding EL student reclassification, and it does not come with additional requirements around how or when the OPTEL must be used for reclassification decisions or parent consultations.

OPTEL Structure

The OPTEL comprises four pages:

- The first page is designed for the observer to record information on student characteristics. In addition, the first page includes sections for the observer to record student receptive ELP skills (listening and reading) as determined through one or more observations and information about the classroom context within which the observations were conducted.

- The second page is designed for the observer to record student expressive ELP skills (speaking and writing) and information about the classroom context within which the observations were conducted.

- The third page is designed for the observer to record consultations with parents or guardians about student progress toward ELP.

- The fourth page is a glossary of terms used throughout the OPTEL.

The OPTEL is available digitally as a fillable PDF and is also designed to be printed as needed. A detailed description of each section of the OPTEL appears below.

Page 1. Student Demographic Information

Information about the OPTEL appears at the top of page 1. Under that information, there is space to record demographic information about the student observed. This includes the following:

- the student's full name, as shown on their official student record, in the space labeled "Student Name".

- the grade level the student was in or will be in during the observation in the space labeled "Grade Level".

- the date or dates that the student was observed in the space labeled "Date(s) Observed." The OPTEL can be used multiple times to inform a single rating, so include all dates observed. Alternatively, it may be more appropriate to start a new form for separate observations if it is thought that the student's ELP may differ between observations.

- whether the student has an IEP or Section 504 Plan. Mark "Yes" if the student has an IEP next to the label "IEP" and "No" if the student does not. Mark "Yes" if the student has a Section 504 Plan next to the label "504 Plan" and "No" if the student does not.

- the student's Summative ELPAC level, in the space labeled "ELPAC Level," at the time of the observation.

Page 1. Section A. Description of Receptive Skills: Listening and Reading Comprehension

Under the student demographic information section is the header for **Section A. Description of Receptive Skills: Listening and Reading Comprehension**. This section describes the receptive skills levels, from Level 1 to Level 4. Next to each level is a radio button that can be selected or filled in to indicate the student's overall receptive ELP level. Select the overall level that best represents the student's receptive ELP skills. The Interpreting OPTEL Performance Level Descriptors section of this User Guide has additional guidance on determining the appropriate level for a student. Of note, the OPTEL categories of receptive and expressive ELP differ from ELPAC composite scores, which represent students' oral and written ELP.

Page 1. Receptive Skills Observation: Instructional Setting

To the right of **Section A. Description of Receptive Skills: Listening and Reading Comprehension**, there is a section for recording which instructional setting or settings the student was observed in when their receptive ELP skills were determined, with the header **Instructional Setting(s) in which the student was observed**. Use the boxes to select or check the box by any instruction setting that the student was observed in when their receptive ELP skills were determined. List any other instructional setting or settings that the student was observed in but that are not provided as options to select from in the designated box labeled "Other."

Page 1. Receptive Skills Observation: Interaction Type

Directly under the section for recording the instructional setting is a section for recording which interaction type or types the student was engaged in when their receptive ELP skills were determined, with the header **Interaction Type(s)**. Use the boxes to select or check the box by the interaction type or types that best align with those the student was engaged in during the entire period of the observation. The options listed include the following:

- Whole Group (one-to-many): Select this option if the student engaged in activities involving the entire class.

- Small Group (one-to-few): Select this option if the student engaged in activities within small groups comprising a few students.

- Pairs (one-to-one): Select this option if the student engaged in activities with one other student.

If there were any other interaction types in which the student was engaged, list them in the box under "Other." One example of what would fit under "Other" is a one-to-one interaction with a teacher.

Page 1. Receptive Skills Rating: Evidence

Directly under the section for recording the interaction type is a section for documenting the evidence used to determine student receptive ELP skills, where it says **What did you consider that led you to mark this level?** In this box, provide in detail the evidence that led to the determination that the student's ELP skills are at the receptive level selected. Documentation that supports the decision may be attached.

Page 1. Receptive Skills Rating: Accommodations

Directly under the box for documenting evidence is a section for documenting accommodations used and a description of any impacts the student's disability had on their ELP. This box should only be used if the student has an IEP or Section 504 Plan. If the student observed has an IEP or Section 504 Plan, provide in detail any accommodations that were used during the observation or observations. Additionally,

describe the extent to which, as applicable, the student's disability may have had an impact on their receptive skills rating. Please refer to the *California Practitioners' Guide for Educating English Learners with Disabilities* for more resources on supporting dually identified students (EL students with disabilities), as well as the accessibility resources provided on the ELPAC web page.

Page 2. Section B. Description of Expressive Skills: Speaking and Writing

The header for **Section B. Description of Expressive Skills: Speaking and Writing appears** at the top of page 2. This section describes the expressive skills levels, from Level 1 to Level 4. Next to each level is a radio button that can be selected or filled in to indicate the student's overall expressive ELP level. In this section, select the overall level that best represents the student's expressive ELP skills. The Interpreting OPTEL Performance Level Descriptors section of this User Guide has additional guidance on determining the appropriate level for a student.

Page 2. Expressive Skills Observation: Instructional Setting

To the right of **Section B. Description of Expressive Skills: Speaking and Writing**, there is a section for recording which instructional setting or settings the student was observed in when their expressive ELP skills were determined, with the header **Instructional Setting(s) in which the student was observed**. Use the boxes to select or check the box by any instruction setting that the student was observed in when their expressive ELP skills were determined. List any other instructional setting or settings that the student was observed in but that are not provided as options to select from in the designated box labeled "Other."

Page 2. Expressive Skills Observation: Interaction Type

Directly under the section for recording the instructional setting is a section for recording which interaction type or types the student was engaged in when their expressive ELP skills were determined, with the header **Interaction Type(s)**. Use the boxes to select or check the box by the interaction type or types that best align with those the student was engaged in during the entire period of the observation. The options listed include the following:

- Whole Group (one-to-many): Select this option if the student engaged in activities involving the entire class.

- Small Group (one-to-few): Select this option if the student engaged in activities within small groups comprising a few students.

- Pairs (one-to-one): Select this option if the student engaged in activities with one other student.

If there were any other interaction types in which the student was engaged, list them in the box under "Other."

Page 2. Expressive Skills Rating: Evidence

Directly under the section for recording the interaction type is a section for documenting the evidence used to determine student expressive ELP skills, where it says **What did you consider that led you to mark this level?** In this box, provide in detail the evidence that led to the determination that the student's ELP skills are at the expressive level selected. Documentation that supports the decision may be attached.

Page 2. Expressive Skills Rating: Accommodations

Directly under the box for documenting evidence is a section for documenting accommodations used and a description of any impacts the student's disability had on their ELP. This box should only be used if the student has an IEP or Section 504 Plan. If the student observed has an IEP or Section 504 Plan, provide in detail any accommodations that were used during the observation or observations. Additionally, describe the extent to which, as applicable, the student's disability may have had an impact on their expressive skills rating. Please refer to the *California Practitioners' Guide for Educating English Learners with Disabilities* for more resources on supporting dually identified students (EL students with disabilities), as well as the accessibility resources provided on the ELPAC web page.

Page 3. Parent Consultation Form: Student Demographic Information

At the top of page 3 is the header **OPTEL Parent Consultation Form**. Under the header is a section for the educator to record student demographic information. In this section, record demographic information about the student observed as on page 1, but that reflects the student information at the time of the consultation if there are differences.

Page 3. Parent Consultation: Notes

There is a large text box on page 3 under the student demographic information section for taking notes on the parent discussion. In this section, document any notes from the consultation with parent(s) or guardian(s) of the student observed. Notes may be taken in advance of the discussion, during the discussion, or after the discussion.

Page 3. Parent Consultation: Educator and Parent Signatures

Under the text box for taking notes is a section for educator and parent signatures. The OPTEL can be used in discussions with the parent(s) about a student's ELP progress, including reclassification decisions. This section will only be used if the consultation focused on the student's reclassification decision. If the consultation did focus on reclassification, after the discussion the educator will record:

- their name;
- whether they agree with the statement that "the student routinely demonstrates fluent English proficiency in order to access grade-level content instruction delivered in English with minimal linguistic support;"

- their signature;
- their title; and
- the date they signed this form.

After the parent(s) has been consulted and given the opportunity to provide their opinion on their ELP, ask them to:

- record their name(s);
- sign their name(s); and
- record the date they signed this form.

Failure to obtain a signature shall not preclude a student from reclassification. More information about how the OPTEL can support parent consultation is included in the section How the OPTEL Can Be Used in Parent Consultations. It is appropriate and allowable for the parent to sign electronically if necessary.

Page 4. Glossary of Terms

At the top of page 4 is the header **Glossary of Terms**. Under the header are definitions of nine terms that are used throughout the OPTEL. These definitions are provided to support OPTEL users in their understanding of the tool and associated resources.

Questions and Answers

This section contains a set of answers and accompanying guidance for what may be common questions from the field regarding the use of the OPTEL.

Question 1: What if the student I am observing is not demonstrating all the skills being evaluated during the observation?

Answer: The [Setting Up Instruction to Use the OPTEL](#) section of this guide is a resource to support the design and implementation of instruction such that EL students are engaging in activities that demonstrate their English reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. Additionally, the OPTEL does not need to be implemented with a single observation but can instead be used for a series of observations across multiple lessons to observe students for as long as needed to make a determination about their receptive and expressive ELP skills.

Question 2: What if I teach in a program where students are using a language other than English?

Answer: The OPTEL is developed and validated only for use in determining a student's ELP and should not be used to assess or evaluate their proficiency in any language other than English. Identifying the appropriate educator to complete the OPTEL may require consulting with all of the educators who work with the student to determine who is best positioned to observe and evaluate the student's ELP skills in academic core content areas.

Question 3: Is the OPTEL just for use if a student's ELPAC score indicates they may be ready to be reclassified?

Answer: The OPTEL has been developed for multiple uses, including as a standardized tool to support an educator's determination of whether a student is ready to be reclassified. However, the OPTEL should not be limited for use only with students who are considered potentially ready for reclassification due to their ELPAC scores. The OPTEL is designed to be useful for observing all EL students at all ELP levels and may support educators by providing them with information on students' ELP that they can share with students and families to support students' growth. The OPTEL can also support educators to design instruction and supports based on an understanding of students' ELP in receptive and expressive skills.

Question 4: Do I have to be an ELD teacher to use the OPTEL, or do I need specific training to use the OPTEL?

Answer: The OPTEL is designed and validated to be used by teachers from all instructional backgrounds, not just ELD teachers. Content teachers and ELD teachers may want to collaborate in observing and rating students using the OPTEL. To support educators in learning to use the OPTEL in alignment with the California ELA Standards, the CDE is developing professional learning materials to support teachers' understanding of how the OPTEL can be used reliably across classrooms.

Question 5: How long does it take to complete the OPTEL?

Answer: There is no required length of time to complete the OPTEL. The OPTEL can be completed in a single lesson or class period, or over multiple lessons as needed.

Question 6: What if I don't have enough time to observe a student?

Answer: The OPTEL does not require a set amount of time for observation. Rather, it is about the opportunity for the student to provide receptive or expressive skills and for the educator to document their evaluation of those receptive or expressive ELP skills. Educators are encouraged to integrate the OPTEL into their regular instructional practice as they deem appropriate without needing to design specific lessons or opportunities for students to demonstrate these skills. The section Setting Up Instruction to Use the OPTEL has more information on how to do this and examples for use in the classroom.

Question 7: What if I am unable to obtain a parent signature for a student who is eligible for reclassification?

Answer: Failure to obtain a parent signature shall not preclude a student from reclassification. Educators are encouraged to work with parents to engage in a meaningful consultation and obtain a signature if the parent agrees with the teacher evaluation; however, a signature on the OPTEL form is not a requirement for a student to be reclassified to RFEP.

Question 8: What if I feel like a student is at different levels for their reading ELP and their listening ELP and I cannot determine what their overall receptive ELP performance level should be?

Answer: The OPTEL has two holistic performance levels: receptive and expressive. While you may feel that a student has different reading and listening ELP performance levels or different writing and speaking ELP performance levels, you will need to review all the evidence you have at hand to make a final determination about their receptive and expressive ELP levels.