2026-2027
Jones County School District
English Learner Program Questions & Answers

Who is an English Learner?

An English Learner (EL)is any student whose first language is not English and who has not met the passing requirements of the English Language Proficiency Test as set forth by the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE). These students are mostly identified by the Home Language Survey given by the district upon registration or by a teacher recommendation and testing by the district. In the Jones County School District, the predominant first language for many of our ELs is Spanish. However, we do have students who speak other languages such as Arabic, Mandarin and many native dialects from Mexico and Central America.

Who is a "newcomer"?

A newcomer is a student in the English Learner Program that has 3 years or less in schools in the United States. Most of the time, students with two years or less do not speak English at all. The state permits the EL students to receive passing grades for a designated time to acquire English without being retained in one grade level for many years.

How do I find the "No Fail" students?

This information can be obtained from the EL teacher at your school. Also, you may find this information in our EL informational program, Ellevation.

What is ELPA21 and who takes it?

The ELPA21 is the English Language Proficiency Test (ELPT) that is given to all English Learners throughout the state of Mississippi. (See section on ELPA21 for more info). Any "current" English Learner is required by federal law to take the ELPT each spring until the student has met the requirements for proficiency.

What is Ellevation?

Ellevation is the digital database that we use for the EL Program in the Jones County School District. It links to PowerSchool so it keeps current information for all ELs. Every teacher has access to this. If you are not signed up to Ellevation, please contact Dr. Debbie Blackledge to request an invite to create your account. Ellevation contains ELPT scores, years ELs have been in U.S schools, current and monitored students, plus much more important information.

I have a Hispanic student in my class that speaks good English. Why is he on the EL list?

More than half of the English Learners in the JCSD speak English very well. Many of them entered the EL program during their elementary years so they have learned how to communicate orally very well. However, this can be deceiving because so many of them still lack the skills and vocabulary to be proficient at reading and writing. Just like our mainstream students, many ELs also deal with learning disabilities (some have IEPs) and a natural weakness for learning English. Combine that with the fact that most speak only their native language outside of the school setting and you will find a major absence of some vocabulary, especially common vocabulary used outside of the school setting, academic vocabulary, and content specific vocabulary.

I have a Hispanic student in my class who is not doing well. Doesn't she need to be in the EL program?

If you suspect that a student in your class is in need of EL services due to **a language barrier**, please contact an EL teacher and we can investigate the status of that student. If the student is deemed to have difficulties due to language, he or she can be tested for the EL program if they have not been tested previously. Many times, these students have already tested out of the EL program during their elementary years. Please remember that it is not always a lack of language skills but rather typical obstacles like behavior, motivation, outside circumstances, and laziness that play a role as well. A student who was previously in the EL Program may be retested for EL services, but this is only in extreme circumstances and must be approved for retesting by the district EL Director, Dr. Debbie Blackledge.

HELP!! I have students that don't speak English at all and I don't know what to do with them!!

The good news is that you are not alone! Jones County School District has the third highest English Learner population in the state of Mississippi. The West side of the district has approximately 70% of the EL population. Most teachers on these campuses have a student that cannot speak English.

EL Charts: First of all, refer to the EL charts. On those charts is a column entitled "Classroom Accommodations". These can be accessed in Ellevation. Please make sure that you are employing these for the listed ELs in your classroom. Many of you do these anyway but it is required that they are afforded these modifications/accommodations.

Focus on vocabulary: Select smaller chunks of vocabulary for students to remember. Have them define, translate, create sentences, find in the text, etc. Keep in mind that many of your mainstream students also do not know subject area vocabulary so just because you translate it doesn't mean the EL student will understand that word. For teachers that don't already teach a set of vocabulary words, you can find commonly used words within the passage you are reading at the time and allow students to work with that vocabulary. For example, take a printout of the passage and give the student a list of words to find in the passage. Have them find and highlight the word. Next, have them write the words in a list then define and translate. For those of you that already have a set vocab list that you teach, please remember to modify it for our EL students. It can be almost impossible when you give a non-English speaking student a list of 87 words to learn in a week/two week period. One of their accommodations is to have shortened assignments. So instead, choose a small list of words. Generally, whatever you do for your inclusion students, you will do much the same for our EL students.

Diagrams/photos: Our EL students are usually fairly good at memorization. So labeling diagrams or photos is always a good activity if your subject area allows.

Google Translate: Remember that Google Translate is a great tool to have; however, it does not always have a sensible translation. So just because you stuck something into Google Translate and put it in the student's native language doesn't mean that the translation is understandable. So if they look at you funny, chances are that the translation doesn't make sense to them. When using Google Translate, it is best to take the English down to its most simple/basic form and then translate.

The internet is your friend: If you take some time and do a little research, you can probably find some basic or Spanish versions of the concepts you are teaching.

SLIFE Students

SLIFE refers to Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education. These students come to us with very little to no education. In the last three years, we have received multiple 7th-12th students from very rural areas of various countries that could not even spell their own names. This can be hard even inside the ESL classroom because these students have NO foundation whatsoever. Language learning is much quicker when a student is educated in their native language. Ultimately, they have been placed in our care, and we as teachers must do something to give them the foundation that they need.

So what do we do with these students?

There is no easy answer to this question. Even in the ESL classrooms, these students are far behind. Rather than just sitting in class and doing nothing, focus on what they CAN do. For example, they can copy words. They need to practice writing so have them copy vocabulary. They can use google translate to translate and "listen" to the word. Of course, this will not happen immediately. Most of these students have never touched a computer at all so they will be learning how to use the computer in order to do this in the ESL classroom.

If God has given you the ability to teach, then this is where you will need to dig deep and look for ways to bring these students up to a new level (not where the other students are but rather the next level for that particular student). Look for what they can do and build on that.

Can I just send my non-English speakers to the EL teachers during my class since they don't understand what we are doing?

Short answer: No. Please remember that our EL teachers are overloaded. Also, our EL teachers do not function like inclusion teachers assisting with mainstream courses. We are teaching actual classes in which they earn credits. This means, we have to make lesson plans, give classwork, homework, quizzes, tests and projects. In middle/high schools, our ELs receive a class grade just like any other class. Because we love our students and want to see them succeed, we don't mind helping them with other work when we are able. This is where it falls upon all of us, not just our EL teachers, to move these students, offer accommodations, and push them to succeed. Our students will always ask to come to us, but unless you have made arrangements with one of us, please do not send them so that it doesn't interfere with our other classes. You may think that they are not getting anything from your class, but I assure you that the more English they hear and see, the more they will learn. Immersion works!

Yearly English Language Proficiency Test Facts

- This is a State test that is given across Mississippi to all English Learners to measure the students' proficiency in English.
- In 2024, the MDE adopted the ELPA21 as the yearly English language proficiency test.
- The same security measures are used during the ELPA21 as with any state test
- The results of the Las Links are part of the accountability model for schools with 10+ ELs which makes this a high stakes test for our schools and district.
- 100% of English Learners must be tested; there are NO exemptions
- The test is given in the Spring Semester.
- This test measures four domains and is given in four parts: Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening (and an Overall score is given from an average of all domains)
- The test is measured on a 1-5 scale as follows:

  Level 1—Beginning

  Level 2—Early Intermediate

  Level 3—Intermediate

  Level 4—Early Advanced

  Level 5—Advanced

- Students can exit the EL program when they have a score of 4 or 5 in all domains (Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking, and overall).

- You can see complete student scores by looking for the student in Ellevation