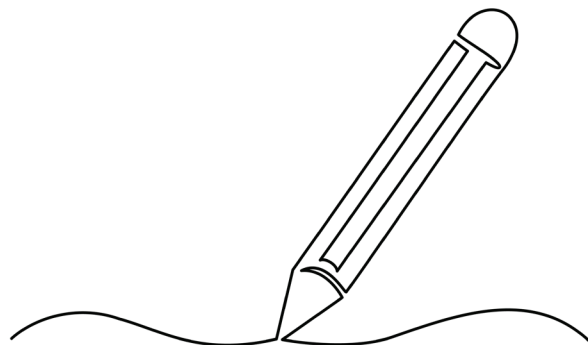


English Language Assessment for Unaccompanied Immigrant Children in California Schools

This factsheet provides an overview of the language assessment process that unaccompanied children will experience when enrolled in California public schools. Public schools must take action to help students overcome language barriers that prevent them from participating school programs.¹

1. Enroll the child in school

Once children begin living with them, sponsors should enroll children in school as soon as possible.² In California, children between 6 and 18 years of age are required to attend school full-time.³ For more information on enrolling a child in California schools, see this [Factsheet](#).



2. Complete the Home Language Survey (HLS)

After the child is enrolled, the school will ask the child's parent (or sponsor, if the sponsor has enrolled the child using the Caregiver Affidavit) to complete a Home Language Survey (HLS). The HLS is a questionnaire that schools use to see if the child needs to be assessed for English language services.⁴ The HLS will ask about the child's first language, most frequently used language, and the language the child hears most frequently at home. The HLS does not ask about immigration status.⁵ The HLS has a line for a parent/guardian signature, but caregivers who have filled out the Caregiver Affidavit are also permitted to sign (write "Parent not available, see Caregiver Affidavit" under signature line).⁶

The answers to the HLS will help the school determine the child's primary language. If English is not the child's primary language, the school will inform the child's parent or caregiver that the child has to take the Initial English Language Proficiency Assessment for California (ELPAC).⁷ The ELPAC notice will be sent in writing, is available in various languages, and must be provided in all languages commonly spoken by students in the school.⁸

3. If needed, the child takes the Initial English Language Proficiency Assessment for California (ELPAC)

The Initial ELPAC is a test that will assess the child's English proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.⁹ The test must be given within 30 days of the child's enrollment in the school.¹⁰ Visit the [ELPAC website](#) for practice tests to help prepare.

After the Initial ELPAC, the school will inform the child's parent or caregiver if the child has been identified as an English Learner who needs English language services.¹¹ The school will also provide information about the English language acquisition programs available to help the child with their English skills.¹² The school must provide this information in writing and in all languages commonly spoken by students in the school.¹³

If a school offers more than one English language acquisition program, parents and caregivers have a choice in which program to enroll their child in.¹⁴ Read the school’s notification carefully and follow the instructions for selecting the one you prefer. Once a child is identified as an English learner, they are required to take another version of the ELPAC, called the “Summative ELPAC,” every spring until they are reclassified as fluent English proficient.¹⁵

English Language Assessments for Students with Disabilities

Schools have an active duty to identify, assess, and provide English language services to children with diagnosed disabilities.

If the child has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) indicating that they are unable to take the Initial ELPAC, the school must provide appropriate accommodations and alternative assessments as necessary.¹⁶ The child may be required to take only certain portions of the ELPAC or qualify to take the Alternate ELPAC, which is a substitute assessment developed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.¹⁷ Accommodations can include closed captioning, the use of a scribe, and alternate response options for students with physical disabilities.¹⁸

Even if the child does not have an IEP or 504 Plan, they may still be able to benefit from accessibility resources during the ELPAC assessment. These tools are available to all students and include breaks, the use of a digital notepad, and clarification of test instructions.¹⁹ The child may also be entitled to supports if a teacher finds them necessary, regardless of whether the child has an IEP or 504 Plan.²⁰ Supports could include translated instructions, altering color contrast, providing paper copies of the test, and offering an alternate test setting with special lighting or adaptive furniture.²¹

Who can I contact for help?

Your School District	To contact your school district, visit the California School Directory , search by your zip code, click the “District” tab, and then click the blue link to your district’s webpage to find the district phone number.
California Department of Education, English Learner Support Division	916-319-0938 Contact Information
Alameda Unified School District	Program Manager of Language and Literacy, 510-670-4269.
Contra Costa County Office of Education	English Learner Specialist, 925-942-5316.
Fresno Unified School District	English Learner Services, 559-457-3928.
Los Angeles Unified School District	Multicultural and Multilingual Education Department, 213-241-5582.
Orange County	Support Service Clerk for Multilingual Services, 407-317-3200, ext. 3762701.
Riverside Unified School District	Coordinator of K-12 English Learners, 951-788-7135, ext. 80721.
San Diego Unified School District	Office of Language Acquisition, 619-725-7264.
San Mateo County Office of Education	Coordinator of English Learner Support Services, 650-802-5348.

Endnotes

- 1 See Equal Education Opportunity and Transportation of Students, 20 U.S.C § 1703(f); *Lau v. Nichols*, 414 U.S. 563 (1974).
- 2 Cal. Dep't of Educ., *Kindergarten in California*, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/em/kinderinfo.asp#:~:text=demographics%20and%20characteristics-,Age%2DEligible%20Children,EC%20Section%2048000%5Ba%5D>.
- 3 Cal. Educ. Code § 48200.
- 4 Catherine E. Lhamon, Assistant Sec'y for Civil Rights, U.S. Dep't of Educ. & Vanita Gupta, Acting Assistant Attorney Gen. for Civil Rights, U.S. Dep't of Justice, *Dear Colleague Letter: English Learner Students*, 1 (Jan. 7, 2015), <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf>; *The Initial ELPAC Process At-a-Glance*, Cal. Dep't of Educ., <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ep/documents/initialelpatglance.pdf>.
- 5 U.S. Dep't of Educ., *Tools and Resources for Identifying All English Learners*, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/english-learner-toolkit/chap1.pdf> (last updated Nov. 2016).
- 6 Based on conversations with the California Department of Education, English Learner Division, Assessment Development and Administration Division on March 5, 2024.
- 7 See Catherine E. Lhamon, Assistant Sec'y for Civil Rights, U.S. Dep't of Educ. & Vanita Gupta, Acting Assistant Attorney Gen. for Civil Rights, U.S. Dep't of Justice, *Dear Colleague Letter: English Learner Students*, 1 (Jan. 7, 2015), <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf>; *The Initial ELPAC Process At-a-Glance*, Cal. Dep't of Educ., <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ep/documents/initialelpatglance.pdf>.
- 8 Cal. Dep't of Educ., *The Initial ELPAC Process At-a-Glance*, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ep/documents/initialelpatglance.pdf>; see *Parent/Guardian Notification*, ELPAC, <https://www.elpac.org/test-administration/parent-notification/>.
- 9 Cal. Dep't of Educ., *English Language Proficiency Assessments*, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ep/>.
- 10 Cal. Dep't of Educ., *English Language Proficiency Assessments*, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ep/>.
- 11 Cal. Dep't of Educ., *Identification & Parent Notification Requirement*, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/t3/elparentletters.asp>.
- 12 *Id.*
- 13 *Id.*
- 14 Cal. Educ. Code § 310(a).
- 15 Cal. Dep't of Educ., *A Parent Guide to Understanding: The English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC)*, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/documents/elpacpgtu.pdf>.
- 16 Cal. Educ. Code § 56385(a).
- 17 See Cal. Dep't of Educ., *Alternative ELPAC*, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ep/alternateelpac.asp>; *ELPAC Administration Student Accessibility Checklist*, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ep/documents/elpacstdaccesslist.pdf>.
- 18 See Cal. Dep't of Educ., *English Language Proficiency Assessments for California Accessibility Resources for Operational Testing*, 2, 19 (Sept. 24, 2019).
- 19 *Id.*
- 20 *Id.*
- 21 *Id.*