

# Supporting Emergent Bilingual Students with Distance Learning



It is critical to keep the impacts of emergency school closures on Emergent Bilingual (also referred to as English learners or ELs) and immigrant students in view so that they can be included in all responses and plans.

## Establish Meaningful Communication with Families

Provide essential communications in languages representative of student and family populations.

- Connect families with interpretation services and/or specific personnel within the district who can provide interpretation services.
- Reach out to each head of family to discuss important facts and school structures for the remainder of the year including supplemental learning resources, how to access meals, and what community groups/contacts/supports are available for the families.
- Designate a school liaison with whom each family can communicate over the phone. Many emergent bilingual students and families may prefer to communicate via phone and text. If your school has not established regular communication with families, this is a good time to start.
- Families may have a wide range of questions and concerns related to this crisis based on their own perspective and experience. Ask cultural/family liaisons or family members who are active in the school community to flag any cultural considerations schools or districts should be aware of.

## Leverage the Home Language as a Learning Resource

Districts can partner with families throughout this time of uncertainty to support learning in many ways.

- There is [abundant research](#) demonstrating the academic and social benefits of bilingualism, as well as literacy transfer across languages. Multilingual families should be encouraged to support their children's learning in the home language. This might include reading books, magazines, or newspapers in the family's home language, and discussing as a family. It could include watching or listening to news or educational programs in the home language as well.
- Multilingual learning resources with students and families can support learning across the content areas in multiple languages. It is important to provide a mix of multilingual resources that are accessible to families regardless of their technology access. Paper resources should be offered where instruction may be hindered by technology access or readiness.
- Students who immigrated to the U.S. after 8th grade may have completed coursework in their home country that could be applied toward their diploma requirements. This may be especially critical for seniors who have not yet completed their diploma requirements. International transcripts should be carefully reviewed for coursework that might be sources of transfer credits. The credits should transfer in the content area, regardless of the language of instruction.

## **Consider the Unique Needs and Concerns of Immigrant Communities**

- Families may be concerned about immigration enforcement, the health of relatives overseas or the impact of travel restrictions. Schools can better tailor their response to this crisis by asking families to share their concerns and questions. (Mental health concerns, particularly higher anxiety.)
- Undocumented workers may not be able to access supports such as paid sick leave, health insurance, remote work options, unemployment benefits or direct payments to taxpayers, which will increase financial hardship. When possible, connect families with services/programs that can:
  - help alleviate hardship related to school closures, missed meals, or lost wages
  - provide medical care and support (especially if you suspect families are uninsured)
  - provide school supplies to students who live in migrant communities
- Draw upon the expertise of EL educators, family liaisons, and community partners who work closely with these student populations and communities. Not only do they know their students well, they are an important bridge and source of continuity during a time of tremendous uncertainty.
- Students may be providing childcare for their own younger siblings and for others. If the school district is implementing any kind of distance learning, keep in mind that it is common for older children in immigrant families to care for younger children so parents can work, particularly when there are increased pressures at home. This will limit their ability to engage in any distance learning and school district staff should be flexible with their schoolwork expectations.

## **Support English Language Development and Grade-Level Content Learning**

Students identified as English learners must receive both English language development and grade-level content area instruction

- English language development instruction must be research-based and tailored to each student's proficiency level.
- Meaningful access to academic content includes language objectives, scaffolds, and visual supports. Teachers should provide multiple representations of concepts and provide vocabulary instruction with an explicit focus on academic language.
- Access digital learning resources designed for English learners. Visual supports to explain or clarify content and vocabulary are key, as well as variation in text difficult to explain content, auditory supports, and clear definitions using simple English vocabulary and structure.