**ELL Advocacy Tool: How to Identify Challenges and Solutions in Your Setting**

The following chart shows examples of how English language learners (ELL) educators can address particular challenges their students face. These examples relate to learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, but the format can be applied and adapted for other topics as well.

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| **Topic: Contact Information**  Schools that use families’ preferred methods of contact have more success connecting with families, identifying and addressing barriers to learning, and partnering with families to support student success.  **Related resource:** [Communicating with ELL Families During COVID-19: 10 Strategies for Schools](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/covid-ells-families) | | | | | | |
| **Challenges** | **Strengths** | **Impacts** | **Check-in: My School/District** | | **Action Steps** | |
| Schools might not be using families’ preferred contact methods.  Schools may not have updated contact records for ELL families.  Families may not have easy access to online systems where they can update their contact information.  **For example,** many immigrantfamilies use prepaid cell phones. These phone numbers may change and families may be reluctant to text or use minutes. | **Families:**  ELL families have may have strong networks among themselves on social media, within their neighborhood, or through community/faith-based organizations.  **Schools/Staff:**  Individual staff members such as ELL educators or family liaisons may have strong relationships with families and know how they wish to communicate. | * Educators may not be able to contact students. * Families and students may not receive important updates on schedules, instruction, and other topics. | * Does my district ask families what methods of contact they prefer? * Does my district communicate using those methods in families’ home languages? * Does my district translate its emergency contact form? * Do families know how to update their information? * Can families access online systems easily to update their information? | | **For Educators:**  Ask families how (and when) they prefer to be contacted:   * Phone * Text * Email * Social media * Other   Explain how families can update their contact information.  **For Schools & Districts:**   * Consider a family survey about preferred methods of contact. * Review existing systems to see if they can be improved, including contact update procedures. * Send frequent reminders to update contact info to all families. | |
| **Topic: Differentiated Instruction by Language Proficiency Levels ELP**  When educators can successfully differentiate for ELLs, not only do they improve students’ access to instruction, they can connect with EL students to determine if they have “too much” work or if they need modifications. This opens up a dialogue about how a student can succeed.  **Resource:** [Differentiation for English Language Learners](https://www.colorincolorado.org/teaching-ells/ell-strategies-best-practices/differentiation-rti-english-language-learners) | | | | | |
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| Educators may not have the time or training needed to differentiate by English language proficiency level in virtual or hybrid settings. | **Families:**  Families may have valuable input on their children’s level of understanding and engagement, especially in virtual settings.  **Schools/Staff:**  ELL educators may have extensive experience and training on how to differentiate for ELLs.  Ensuring that they have opportunities to collaborate with colleagues can increase the use of the strategies they recommend. | ELLs are overwhelmed and lost in online or hybrid learning that requires independent learning without the language skills to access the content.  Student absences may increase, even leading students to drop out.  Educators are frustrated by lack of student participation or assignment submissions. | | * Does the district have ELL training available to support distance learning or hybrid instruction for ELLs? * Are there clear equity statements about providing ELL student support for academic success? * How is additional ELL support provided for students who need it? | Analyze the student data for trends.   * Which students are attending classes? * Which assignments are being submitted? * What does this tell you about instruction for ELs?   Identify supports such as visuals, a consistent schedule of tasks, and differentiated expectation rubrics by ELP.  Collaborate/co-teach with EL staff to develop instructional supports for ELs.  EL and classroom teachers can review ELP student reports and create “cheat sheets” of differentiated supports by proficiency level.  **Schools & Districts**  Set clear expectations and provide district-level support for educators instructing ELs.  Examine policies and practices that prevent ELs from academic success such as grading policies, scheduling demands, or attendance policies. |

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| **Topic: Attendance**  Research has shown that student attendance is one of the biggest factors to influence academic success. Students will have more opportunities to achieve, be exposed to English language, and develop social skills. This is particularly critical during the schooling interruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic.  **Resource:** [How COVID-19 Is Impacting ELL and Immigrant Families](https://www.colorincolorado.org/covid-ell) | | | | |
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| In some classes, English learners are not attending virtual/hybrid classes.  Students may be juggling numerous responsibilities, including employment, taking care of siblings or other loved ones, and translation of important documents or conversations for the family. | **Families:**  Students and families may be navigating complex systems – and at the same time, developing high levels of resilience and resourcefulness.  The better educators know their families, the more visible these strengths will be.  **Schools/Staff:**  Schools with strong family partnerships know what situations their families are experiencing and how they can be most effective in offering support. | If ELLs are not engaging in learning regularly, this may cause students to struggle academically, fall behind, fail classes, drop out, or be retained.  Educators may be frustrated by lack of student participation or assignment submissions. | * Is information being regularly shared in a language that families and students understand about student schedules and expectations for attendance? * Do ELLs have the tools they need to actively participate and be engaged in virtual learning? * Are educators providing the appropriate scaffolds for ELLs in ALL classes? * Is there an underlying reason for student absenteeism? Is the ELL working to support their family or taking care of siblings? How is their mental health? Are they overwhelmed by the amount of work? | Analyze the student data for trends.   * Which students are attending classes? * Which assignments are being submitted? * When is that work being submitted? * What does this tell you about why the student is absent?   Collaborate with teachers and family liaisons and share possible reasons the ELL is not attending classes. Brainstorm some possible next steps.  **Schools & Districts**  Ensure that attendance policies are clear.  Discuss possible incentive programs for attending school regularly.  Talk with ELL educators and family liaisons about what tools, resources, or communication might be needed to support ELL success. |

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| **Topic:**  Why this does this matter to ELLs’ success?  **Resource:** | | | | |
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|  | **Families:**  **Schools/Staff:** |  |  |  |