

Guidance on Extended Distance Learning for English Learners

April 29, 2020

Following Governor Reeves' announcement that all elementary and secondary schools in the state will be closed for the remainder of the Spring 2020 semester, the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) continues to offer strategies for supporting academic and English language growth during this unprecedented time. Districts must continue to provide services to ELs that enable access to core content as well as to English language development in a manner that is consistent with state guidelines for social distancing, which protects the health and safety of students and staff. It is also essential that districts are consistent in their efforts towards meeting state and federal civil rights laws for English learners (ELs).

This guidance document may be used to help build customized learning opportunities that meet varying district, school, teacher, student, and family needs.

Language Service Plan (LSP)

The methods originally developed by districts and schools to provide resources and supports to ELs have been altered during extended school closures. It is recommended that schools attach an addendum to the LSP for the distance learning plan and further document the student's progress during the implementation of this plan. The addendum should also note:

- any additional accommodations and/or changes to the instructional accommodations utilized as these may be different from those used in the traditional learning environment
- how supports and resources are provided (i.e., virtual conferencing, digital and/or paper-based resources) for your students; and
- how communication is provided to parents to keep them updated on school related issues, including
 - written or oral communication and/or
 - the types of resources provided for parents who understand either written or spoken English, and for those who need information translated into their home language (this may include using a translation service or device, utilizing bi-lingual staff members, etc.)

Student Evaluation Team Meetings (SET)

It is recommended that SET meetings are conducted virtually or by phone. The data collected on the students before and during the time out of school should be reviewed, and any needed adjustments to the LSP can be made.

Instructional Strategies for Distance Learning

Distance learning offers many positive opportunities for differentiation based on student need. This change may also offer many challenges due to fewer opportunities for the interactions which are necessary for all language learners. The strategies in the following charts are suggestions to support growth in the four language domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing in a distance learning environment.

Technology-Based Strategies	Screen-Free Strategies
<p>Domain Specific</p> <p>Listening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide students with links to audible e-books or videos of books for suggested reading assigned by their teachers. This will support understanding of concepts if reading level is below grade level and enable them to better complete related assignments. 	<p>Domain Specific</p> <p>Listening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage students to listen to English songs on the radio and illustrate a visual to summarize or convey the meaning of the song.
<p>Speaking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow students to record their responses to questions using technology recording devices or over the phone using resources such as Flipgrid, ChatterPix or Chatterpix Kids. • Provide opportunities for EL classes to meet virtually or in a group call to practice oral language skills. 	<p>Speaking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage students to read books aloud in English, sing songs in English, and talk to friends/family over the phone or from a safe distance in English. • When practicing alone, encourage students to look in a mirror as they speak to ensure proper mouth placement.
<p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide leveled texts for reading material assigned by classroom teachers using resources such as Newsela, Immersive Reader or Rewordify. 	<p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the use of reading logs where students list the books that they have read and provide a brief summary of the book. • Provide sentence frames, sentence starters, or graphic organizers as needed depending on the level of English language acquisition. For students reading longer chapter books, the summary could be for the end of each chapter with a brief opinion piece at the end of the book. • Consider loaning out decodable or on level books (out of use textbooks are also a good resource) for students to use at home during school closures.
<p>Writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow students to write in an on-line shared document and to read it aloud to 	<p>Writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage journaling on daily observations. Students can

<p>the ESL teacher, the virtual class, to a family member, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a schedule for responding to journal writing to provide teacher feedback to individual students. This encourages writing as well as models good writing for students. 	<p>write, draw pictures, or use a combination of the two depending on their English language level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the use of double entry journals where students write what they know about a topic for a book/article that they will read. After reading, they will add an entry about what they learned from the text about the topic.
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General Strategies

Consider the following suggestions for providing EL support:

1. Collaborate with core content and other ESL teachers.

This can be accomplished through co-planning where ESL teachers meet virtually with content teachers and/or other ESL teachers to plan lessons that utilize appropriate accommodations to support ELs as they learn the core content.

- Supports content level objectives and enables the ESL teacher to review language objectives with students to support learning subject area content and to support English language development.
- Allows ESL teachers to further support EL growth by working with content teachers to create scaffolds such as graphic organizers and meaningful visuals to support understanding of academic vocabulary and incorporating appropriate accommodations.
- Enables the ESL teacher to create thematic lessons around core content presented by classroom teachers.
- Provides an opportunity to truly support an understanding of EL growth and ensure that ELs are able to access lessons, activities, materials, etc.

2. Chunk content material into smaller portions.

- Pacing instruction so that one idea or step is introduced at a time will help make learning content material more manageable for ELs who are learning content along with a new language at the same time.

3. Allow for flexibility with pacing and assignment completion.

- Posting weekly assignments at the start of the week (or over the weekend if possible) will allow students the flexibility to ask needed questions, access needed materials, and complete tasks in a timely manner.
- Keep in mind that ELs may need extended time to complete assigned tasks, so consider using “windows” for due dates as opposed to specific dates to provide for this accommodation.

- Allow flexibility for technology issues that may prevent students from meeting deadlines and/or uploading assignments.

4. Explicitly teach students how to use technology specific to your class.

Distance learning is new to many students. It is essential that they have explicit directions (both verbal and written) that they can refer to in order to complete and turn in assignments.

- Consider assigning a “tech buddy” for students who may need additional supports using technology. These buddies may be same language students or tech savvy students.
- Teachers could also post videos or share their screen to model and demonstrate step by step directions on how to utilize class specific technology.

Applying Best Practice Strategies to Distance Learning

Best practices for ELs have provided teachers with methods for supporting their EL students in content area classes. Below are methods for adapting and applying these strategies in a distance learning situation.

- 1. Use visuals whenever possible** – Incorporating visual aids is essential in a distance learning situation and can be provided in the form of pictures or videos presented via virtual presentations or printed pictures sent to students in printed packets.
- 2. Moderate speech for fluency and enunciation** – This is especially important when speaking through devices such as telephones or computers. Devices can cut speech off at crucial times, so it is especially important to repeat as needed to ensure student understanding. Teachers may also wish to utilize the chat bar to give written directions in addition to verbal directions. This will provide a visual support for directions as well as provide support when audio issues arise.
- 3. Allow students to write out answers before speaking** – Teachers can provide questions to students prior virtual/telephone meeting times to allow them to formulate answers to be used in virtual/telephone discussions.
- 4. Refrain from allowing “shout outs” when asking group questions** – During virtual/telephone group discussions, it is essential that the teacher regulate opportunities for input by all students one at a time. This will ensure that all students are able to provide input and are able to hear their classmates’ responses/ideas.
- 5. Write down key terms** – Displaying key terms for lessons on paper printouts, screens, or via text message is important to ensure that EL students are aware of vocabulary that will be used and introduced. Many English words sound alike, so it is imperative that teachers provide ELs with the exact words they will use especially when introducing new content area vocabulary.
- 6. Use scaffolding techniques to support learning** - Scaffolding techniques such as graphic organizers, notes emailed or provided in printed packets in advance of the lesson or setting up virtual partners are meant to support students as they learn new material.

Keep in mind that while certain scaffolds may have worked in a traditional classroom setting, adjustments may be needed for distance learning to fully support ELs.

7. **Incorporate conversation into all aspects of your teaching** – Now more than ever, EL students may have fewer opportunities to practice their English skills, therefore it is essential that teachers provide those opportunities when assigning group work and during virtual/telephone class times. This may be conducted over the phone or through other virtual meeting methods. If these options are not possible, teachers should consider scheduling call times to check in with individual students which will provide opportunities for students to practice English language skills.

In addition to this guidance, the following MDE webpages offer additional resources and supports:

1. COVID-19 Updates for Districts: <https://www.mdek12.org/COVID19>
2. Learning-at-Home Resources for Families: <https://www.mdek12.org/LearningAtHome>
3. Learning-at-Home Resources for Districts: <https://www.mdek12.org/covid19/districtresources>

Resources are regularly added to these websites. Check back often to see additions.

Additional supports for ELs can be found in the Mississippi Department of Education’s *English Learner Guidelines: Regulations, Funding Guidance and Instructional Supports*, online at https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/MDE/OAE/OEER/EL/EL%20Guidance%2C%20Funding%2C%20and%20Instructional%20Supports_combinedAug2018.pdf

Resources:

ChatterPix is a free app that allows upper elementary to high school students to create “talking” images; features a 30 second voice recording, the ability to add backgrounds and graphics and can be saved to a camera roll

ChatterPix Kids is a free app that allows primary students to create “talking” images; features a 30 second voice recording, the ability to add photo filters and can be saved to a camera roll

Flipgrid is a free app that allows students to record a video response (15 second - 10 minutes in duration) to a teacher prompt; the teacher prompt can either be written or a video recording

Immersive Reader is a free tool that supports literacy development and features supports for reading comprehension, language learning and decoding for struggling readers

Newsela is a website which provides non-fiction texts at different reading levels and features primary sources, biographies, speeches, careers, myths and legends; it also features a sign-in with Google credentials

Rewordify is a website that allows teachers to simplify text to make it more comprehensible for students; it features the ability to enter your own text, simplification of difficult words and supports vocabulary development

Sock Puppets Complete is a free app that allows students to create “talking” images; features a 30 second voice recording, the ability to add backgrounds and graphics and can be saved to a camera roll

Visual Resources:

These free sites can support the use of meaningful visuals to assist you as you work with students to learn new vocabulary and/or concepts:

- **Pixabay** - <https://pixabay.com>
- **Morguefile** - <https://morguefile.com>
- **Flickr** - <https://www.flickr.com>
- **Classroom Clipart** - <https://classroomclipart.com>

EL Contact Information

As always, the MDE EL team is available to support individuals who work with ELs.

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