



# Guidance for Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) Programs

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# Part 1: Moving Massachusetts Forward for English Learners

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This guidance begins with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s (DESE, henceforth known as the Department) [academic vision for all students](#). This vision is grounded in the belief that all students should experience high-quality education, and it reflects the Commonwealth’s commitment to the academic success and immense potential of English Learners (ELs). Additionally, this guidance emphasizes the importance of integrating academic content and language development in EL instruction, maintaining an asset-based approach that builds on the strengths ELs bring to their school experience, and having all leaders and educators across the system share accountability for EL success.

As educators across the Commonwealth, we have an imperative to support ELs in our schools, and we must continue to work to eliminate the existing equity gaps experienced by ELs. The most recent data demonstrates persistent access and equity gaps for ELs when compared to their non-EL peers. See, for example, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine’s [Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures](#) (2017) as well as DESE’s [Policy Brief: Teacher Equity Gaps in Massachusetts](#) (2017).

- EL students drop out of school at a rate that nearly triples the average dropout rate
- ELs are 70% more likely to be assigned to teachers rated “Needs Improvement” or “Unsatisfactory”
- ELs are assigned to inexperienced teachers (those with less than three years of experience) 36% more often
- ELs are assigned to teachers who do not hold the appropriate license for the class 2.59 times more often
- ELs are assigned to teachers with a low<sup>1</sup> [Student Growth Percentile](#) (SGP) in math 53% more often
- ELs are assigned to teachers with a low SGP in ELA 31% more often



Watch some of our EL families discussing the importance of the schooling experience in the short video [Fulfilling Our Promise: Snapshots of English Learners and their Families](#)

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<sup>1</sup> Low teacher SGP = 34.5 or lower

## Purpose and Audience of this Document

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance for district and school leaders to strengthen [SEI programs](#)<sup>2</sup> and improve education for ELs. The goal is to increase capacity, program quality, and systematic, sustained excellence in SEI programs. This guidance compels and supports equity and continuous improvements for ELs to match the academic success of all Massachusetts students. More specifically, this guidance has the following purposes:

- Increase clarity about SEI programs
- Identify critical factors and conditions to strengthen SEI programs
- Initiate or increase district and school-wide collaborative practices
- Improve SEI program design, delivery, and ongoing evaluation to support ELs to meet college, career, and civic standards as described in the [Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks](#) (henceforth known as the Frameworks).

The primary intended audience for this guidance is district and school leaders and teams responsible for building, improving, and evaluating SEI programs and developing the systems and strategies to support best practices. The Department underscores the importance of cross-district investment in supporting ELs and the shared responsibility and collaboration required of all educators that research indicates will lead to EL success.<sup>3</sup> A secondary audience includes educators, family liaisons, and community organizations seeking to deepen their understanding of SEI programs.

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<sup>2</sup> This document is guidance for SEI program infrastructure only and does not include guidance on designing and implementing curriculum and instruction.

<sup>3</sup> It is important that all teachers share the responsibility of educating ELs. Teacher quality has been consistently identified as the most important school-based factor in student achievement (McCaffrey, Lockwood, Koretz, & Hamilton, 2003; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Rowan, Correnti, & Miller, 2002; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Collaborative practices among teachers and school leadership benefits ELs (Lacina, New Levine, & Sowa, 2006; Pawan & Sietman, 2007; Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2008; York-Barr, Ghere, & Sommerness, 2007; Haager & Windmueller, 2001; Ruíz, Rueda, Figueroa, & Boothroyd, 1995). It is important for teachers to have an understanding of language and its use across content areas, and to work together to share expertise (Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2002; Egbert & Ernst-Slavit, 2010; Gibbons, 2008; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Eckert, 2006; Yedlin, 2007; Verplaetse, 2008; Davison, 2006; Haager & Windmueller, 2001; Ruíz, Rueda, Figueroa, & Boothroyd, 1995).

## The Importance of Collaboration for English Learner Success

Programs for ELs are most effective when all educators and leaders in a system engage in the common goal of helping ELs succeed. The Department recommends that district staff select a team of leaders who will use this guide to strengthen the SEI program.

### **Suggested District and School Leadership Team Composition:**

Teams will vary according to district and school size, staffing roles, and other characteristics. A team of core district/school leaders could include: assistant superintendent; principal/assistant principal; ELD director/coordinator; director/lead of curriculum and instruction; chief academic officer; director of assessment; director of family and community engagement; language and content teacher leaders and chairpersons of teams whose roles overlap with this work; coaches; grants manager; data analyst; guidance counselor; and others as appropriate, depending on the needs of ELs and their families in the district (e.g., director of special education, director of transportation, refugee services liaison, etc.).

### **Collective Action:**

Several overlapping building and district-level teams regularly engage in various types of planning. When planning for EL success, make sure there is cohesion, communication, buy-in, and collective responsibility among these teams.

## Part 2: SEI Program Design Elements

### A Background in Program Foundations: *Castañeda*

Important federal and state laws, court decisions, and policies have shaped SEI programs as we know them in Massachusetts today.

Offering guidance that is based on various court cases, the Office of Civil Rights has affirmed the rights of ELs to have equal access to a meaningful opportunity to participate in educational programs. Federal guidance directs districts and schools to offer **English Learner Education (ELE) programs** that are appropriate and targeted to the EL population, and Massachusetts state law requires ELE programs to be based on the linguistic and educational needs of ELs in the school district. ELE programs, including SEI programs, must contain a) subject matter content and b) an English language acquisition component.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1981 *Castañeda v. Pickard* case, the federal court established a three-prong test for determining the soundness of a program serving ELs, and whether schools are taking "appropriate action" to address their needs as required by the Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA).<sup>5</sup>

#### The Foundation: *Castañeda's* Three-Pronged Test

1. **Sound Theory:** The educational theory underlying the language assistance program is recognized as sound by some experts in the field or is considered a legitimate experimental strategy.
2. **Effective Implementation:** The program and practices used by the district are reasonably calculated to effectively implement the educational theory adopted by the district.
3. **Student Growth:** The program succeeds when producing results indicating that students' language barriers are actually being overcome within a reasonable period of time.

A fourth implicit statement in *Castañeda* might read: based on the evidence of program effectiveness, does the district make sufficient efforts to improve the program or to modify the program? Furthermore, notice that *Castañeda* does not mandate that a district or school use a specific method, language of instruction, or type of ELE program.

SEI is one of three ELE program types the Department recognizes as sound under the first prong of the *Castañeda* test:

- [Two-Way Immersion](#) (TWI)/Dual Language Education (DLE)
- Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE)
- Sheltered English Immersion (SEI)

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<sup>4</sup> G.L. c. 71A, § 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Castañeda v. Pickard*, 648 F.2d 989 (5th Cir. 1981). See also: [English Learner Tool Kit for SEAs and LEAs](#), chapter 2;.

The *Castañeda* test serves as a foundation for the development of all ELE programs, including SEI. It can be a powerful tool for helping districts design, evaluate, and improve programs. As an example, below are some questions *Castañeda* may prompt districts and schools to ask to strengthen SEI programs.

### **PRONG 1: Some Thinking Prompts to Develop or Review a District's Sound Educational Theory**

- What is the educational theory of our SEI program, such as our beliefs and assumptions about language?
- How is our educational theory supported by research?
- If components of our program are not well supported by research, what changes should we make?

*Each district has unique populations, communities, and resources (linguistic, academic, social, extra-curricular, demographic, technological, etc.). Each district has particular community values and a distinct program philosophy. Program goals should reflect each district's individual circumstances and the population those districts serve.*

- Why has the district chosen to offer the SEI program? When was the last time the district considered its options in terms of program model and design?
- What are the goals and approaches of the district's SEI program?
- Are the goals responsive to the needs of the students and how do we know?

*Once the district has determined its guiding educational theory as it relates to the education of ELs in an SEI program, and has contextualized it for the district's particular student body, communities, etc. – how can the district express this as a theory of action?*

- Aside from identification, placement, exit, and monitoring procedures,<sup>6</sup> what should be the district's educational plan (structural, curricular, instructional initiatives and projects) in the SEI program to achieve ELs' language and academic goals?
- How can the district ensure stakeholder support for the SEI program design, and communicate this plan clearly to all so that all staff can implement it skillfully and with fidelity?

### **PRONG 2: Some Thinking Prompts to Develop or Review a District's Effective Implementation**

- What structures and practices should the district enact to effectively implement its sound educational theory to well serve the EL student population, and their strengths and needs in the SEI program? (Consider scheduling, staffing, budgets, professional learning, collaborative time, family engagement, embedding of socio-emotional and culturally responsive practices, etc.)

*School districts have an obligation to provide the personnel and resources necessary to effectively implement their chosen ELE programs. This obligation includes having highly qualified teachers to provide language assistance services, trained administrators who can evaluate these teachers, and adequate and appropriate materials for the EL programs.<sup>7</sup>*

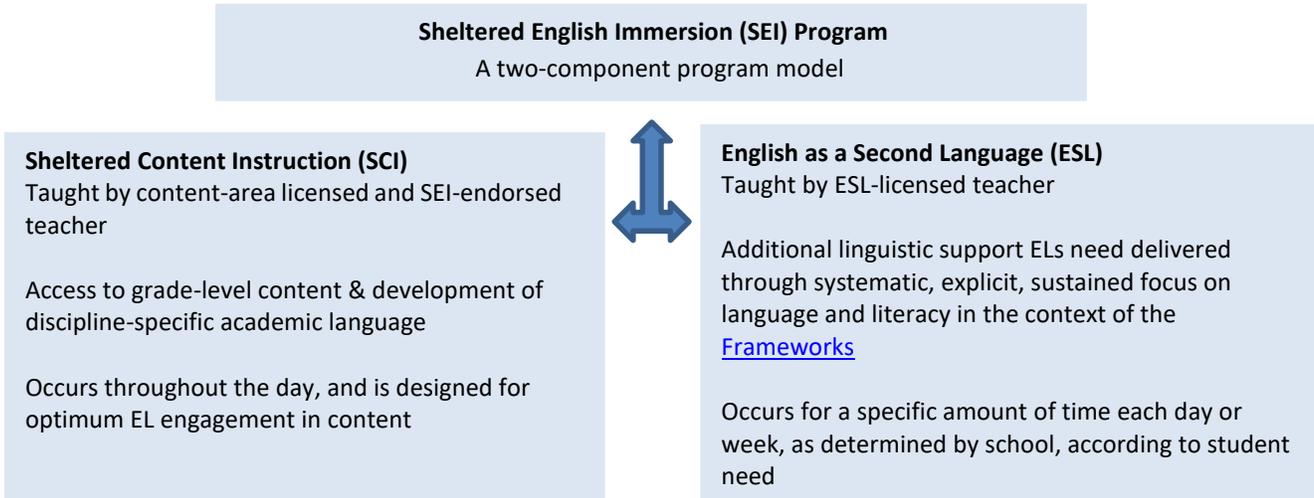
- Does the district's planned and documented curriculum and instruction for ELs reflect a sound educational theory as applied through a theory of action?

### **PRONG 3: Some Thinking Prompts to Develop or Review a District's Continuous Program Improvement**

- As the district engages in program evaluation, are students obtaining the desired results with the current SEI program goals and implementation of developing proficiency English and achieving academically to become ready for college, career, and civic life? If not, what might the district be able to adjust, and what is the rationale for the changes?

## SEI Program Defined

In Massachusetts, instruction for ELs in an SEI program is designed around two main building blocks:



## Long Term Agenda of Collaboration at Every Level

<sup>6</sup> For guidance on these required processes, please consult Guidance on Identification, Assessment, Placement, and Reclassification of English Language Learners

<sup>7</sup> For more information, please see the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice's joint "[Dear Colleague](#)" letter reminding states, school districts, and schools of their obligations under federal law to ensure that ELs have equal access to a high-quality education and the opportunity to achieve their full academic potential.

Massachusetts [law](#) defines SEI as “an English language acquisition process for young children in which nearly all classroom instruction is in English but with the curriculum and presentation designed for children who are learning the language. Books and instruction materials are in English and all reading, writing, and subject matter are taught in English. Although teachers may use a minimal amount of the child's native language when necessary, no subject matter shall be taught in any language other than English, and children in this program learn to read and write solely in English.”<sup>8</sup>

SEI programs in Massachusetts should comply with the [Guidance on Identification, Assessment, Placement, and Reclassification of English Language Learners](#), and must undergo periodic reviews through the state’s [ELE Tiered Focused Monitoring System](#). The same document also contains licensure and endorsement requirements for educators and administrators working in an SEI program.

What are the SEI program’s language goals?	Proficiency and literacy in English, and content achievement.
How often are students’ other languages used in an SEI program?	Students’ other languages may be used informally, but not routinely. <sup>9</sup>
When does a student start an SEI program, and how long does it last?	The SEI program may start at any age or grade, and lasts as long as necessary, until the English language is no longer a barrier for academic engagement and achievement in English-language classrooms and the student is exited from the program.
Are ELs integrated with non-ELs?	ELs and non-ELs are integrated to varying degrees. For example, a newcomer portion of an SEI program may be relatively self-contained for a transitional time, or in another instance, an EL may be with English-proficient peers all day while still receiving support for both access to grade-level content and dedicated English language development. Be careful not to segregate ELs unnecessarily. For more on this, please visit <a href="#">Creating an Inclusive Environment and Avoiding Unnecessary Segregation</a> from the federal <a href="#">EL Tool Kit</a> .
What are SEI classrooms?	In an SEI program, they are content classrooms with at least one EL, where <a href="#">SEI-endorsed</a> , content-licensed educators shelter instruction so that ELs can meaningfully engage with grade-level content, and develop discipline-specific academic language. This type of instruction within the SEI program is called <b>Sheltered Content Instruction (SCI)</b> .

<sup>8</sup> G.L. c. 71A, §2.

<sup>9</sup> It is important to note here that [research](#) indicates that students’ languages and cultures are valuable resources, and that incorporating these resources into classroom instruction provides a rich curriculum and positive, affirming school environment for ELs. [WIDA’s Guiding Principles of Language Development](#) also state that “Students’ academic language development in their native language facilitates their academic language development in English. Conversely, students’ academic language development in English informs their academic language development in their native language.”

<p>What is English as a Second Language (ESL)?<sup>10, 11</sup></p>	<p>The structure of SEI programs highlights that SCI and content accessibility alone do not provide enough dedicated focus, support, or assistance toward developing the language and literacy instruction ELs need to reach the kind of linguistic complexity demanded by the <a href="#">Curriculum Frameworks</a>. This is especially true of ELs at foundational levels, whose additional language needs are different from those of proficient English speakers.</p> <p>ESL offers systematic, explicit, and sustained language instruction in the context of the Frameworks. Thus, the SEI program in Massachusetts includes both language and content as important instructional considerations for planning ESL and SCI. Although each component of the program has a different driving instructional focus, both must incorporate language and content (in different ways, informed by the different levels of expertise and qualifications of corresponding educators, such as expertise in language acquisition or in a particular discipline). As a result, both components of SEI programs in Massachusetts (ESL and SCI) contribute to ELs’ academic success despite having different primary purposes.<sup>12</sup></p>
<p>What is the relationship between ESL and SCI?</p> <p> Visit our <a href="#">Spotlight on Collaboration and Co-Teaching</a></p>	<p><b>Shared responsibility, expertise, and collaboration lead to EL achievement.</b> To provide an effective and coherent SEI program, content and language educators need common planning time (CPT), regular opportunities to interact in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for shared planning of curriculum, instruction, and assessment for ELs. This type of co-planning and collaboration between content and language is a priority for an SEI program. Educators working in isolation cannot meet all of the challenges involved with giving ELs access to high-quality curricula.</p> <p>This is because several educators are often responsible for the different instructional components of the SEI program that addresses ELs’ linguistic and academic needs, yet they are collectively responsible for the success and outcomes of the whole, comprehensive instructional program. In order for different teachers-of-record (content or ESL) to effectively, intentionally, and coherently plan instruction for ELs, schools should support systematic and dedicated collaboration and co-planning time. By coordinating and collaborating in planning ESL and content curricula, educators support one another, share unique fields of expertise, and take collective responsibility for EL achievement.<sup>13</sup></p>

<sup>10</sup> For comprehensive guidance on ESL in Massachusetts, please visit the [Next Generation ESL Curriculum Resource Guide](#).

<sup>11</sup> Please see G.L. c. 71A, section 2 for the definition of ESL in the LOOK Act.

<sup>12</sup> Please visit page 17 of the [Next Generation ESL Curriculum Resource Guide](#) to see the “Definition of the Focus of ESL Instruction in Massachusetts.”

<sup>13</sup> [WIDA Essential Actions](#) 14 and 15 (Gottlieb, 2013, pp. 58–66).

## English Language Development (ELD) Happens All Day

The Department uses the term English language development (ELD) to describe all of the language development that takes place throughout the student’s day, in both SEI classrooms and during ESL time. The [Next Generation ESL Project: Curriculum Resource Guide](#) defines these two types of ELD (p. 17), and we further describe them below.

### ELD in SCI → In addition to—not as a replacement for— ESL

- ELD happens in an *integrated* way as [SEI-endorsed](#), content-licensed educators shelter instruction and help ELs develop discipline-specific academic language. ELD happens in SEI classrooms as ELs learn grade-level content along with their proficient English-speaking peers.
- In strong SEI programs, sheltered content lessons deliver high-quality ELD instruction throughout the day and across disciplines. Although the audience for ELD in SEI/SCI is ELs, all students benefit from these lessons that make academic language demands more transparent to students. Strong SEI teachers focus on meaningful and engaging activities designed to build content knowledge while strategically taking into account the language demands that ELs face in content classrooms, scaffolding appropriately to meet these demands, and delving into specifics about the language of the content.<sup>14</sup>
- Teachers derive instructional focus from two sets of standards taught in tandem: the [Frameworks](#) for the subject area and the [WIDA Standards](#), which are designed to address language development across and within the content areas of English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, as well as social and instructional language.

### ELD in SEI/SCI → In addition to—not as a replacement for— SCI

- ELD also occurs during ESL time, when ELs are grouped together and licensed ESL teachers guide students in a systematic, dedicated, and sustained study time to develop various aspects of the English language proficient English speakers already know.
- ELD in ESL is the dedicated time where language, language goals, and language growth are the primary instructional focus. In strong SEI models, educators tie ESL cohesively and plan it strategically in tandem with the key language demands of the core content areas, key academic practices, and the key uses of academic language. Most types of learning activities teachers use during ESL time—such as analyzing mentor texts, unpacking sentences, and learning vocabulary—are the same as those used during ELD in SEI Content. ESL instruction develops students’ academic language practices such as arguing with evidence, justifying conclusions, expressing cause-and-effect relationships, describing one’s reasoning, making predictions, and negotiating meaning. However, ESL instruction provides a greater opportunity to focus intensely on the language of the texts and the learning needs of ELs at differing proficiency levels.

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<sup>14</sup> The [SEI Endorsement Course](#) introduces educators to sheltering strategies.

- While lessons during ELD in SEI classrooms might contain a heterogeneous group of students—ELs at various proficiency levels, students who have been reclassified as former ELs, students who speak English only—ESL time is the opportunity for teachers to hone in more closely on the needs of each student at a particular English proficiency level in each skill area (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). As much as possible, students should be grouped by proficiency level during ESL time (in situations where ELs in a class are at multiple levels, then smaller groups should be of students at no more than two adjacent levels). In addition, schools should not remove EL students from core SEI content instruction to participate in ESL instruction.
- A strong ESL curriculum is well-aligned and articulated; can successfully engage students and guide them toward the outcomes of college, career, and civic readiness; offers students opportunities to develop their linguistic and cultural resources; is directly applicable to real-world problems and issues that are important to students; builds critical lenses to promote individual and community agency; and can help students develop the necessary tools to make effective choices for themselves and their future roles in the world as they develop language within meaningful academic and social contexts of schooling.



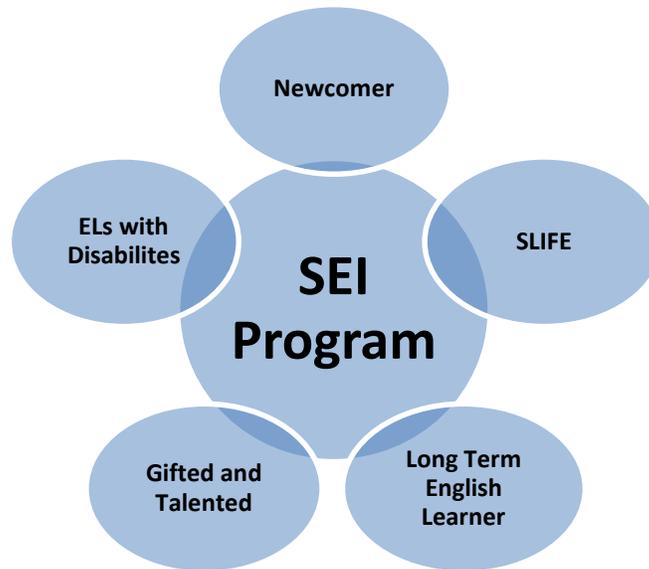
For in-depth guidance about ESL as a subject in Massachusetts and ESL curriculum development, please visit the [Next Generation ESL Project](#) page.



The [SEI Smart Card](#) is an observational guide for school leaders to use as they walk through sheltered content classrooms.

### **SEI Programming Based on Student Needs**

Within the overall SEI program, districts may determine the level of ELE services and language development support based on student needs. For instance, some students enroll in the district for the first time with little to no English proficiency and some may have experienced interrupted education or have limited formal education prior to their enrollment. The Department encourages each district or school to determine the strengths and specific needs of its particular student population and design the SEI program accordingly to respond to these students' and their families' aspirations. Diverse student populations that may receive ELE services in the districts' SEI programs may include newcomers, ELs with disabilities (ELSWD), students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE), gifted or talented students and long-term English learners.



### **Newcomer EL Support**

Districts or schools may serve ELs who have recently immigrated, and who are at the earliest levels of English language proficiency, such as English Proficiency Levels 1 and 2. Newcomers may have varying levels of literacy in English or other languages (see the section below on SLIFE). Typically, this support is for secondary students, designed to meet the unique needs of this population, and is temporary and transitional. The [Next Generation ESL Project: Curriculum Resource Guide](#) (pp. 22-24) provides a description of characteristics of newcomer support models, including a scenario.

### **Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE)**

In successful SEI programs, schools carefully plan to ensure that students develop the literacy, numeracy, and academic skills they need to be successful as they continue their education in the United States. [The Massachusetts Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education \(SLIFE\) Definition and Guidance](#) provides detailed information on identifying ELs who are SLIFE, and on elements of support models to meet the needs of these students.

### **Strategic Academic Language and Literacy for Long Term ELs (LTELs)**

Current literature designates students who have been in ELE programs for more than 5 years as LTELs.<sup>15</sup> Successful SEI programs focus on specially-designed instruction at the secondary level to ensure that LTELs have rigorous, purposefully scaffolded learning opportunities to accelerate their academic discourse and literacy; safe and risk-encouraging classroom environments; an engaging and supportive school climate that includes strong, caring adult and peer relationships; flexible scheduling and relevant, motivating texts; and a curriculum-wide focus on study skills, metacognition, and varied learning strategies. Content and topics selected for the curriculum should be relevant and motivating for students.

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<sup>15</sup> Provisional definition based on federal requirements—see [English Learner Tool Kit for SEAs and LEAs](#).

Teachers should collaborate with students' core content teachers to build capacity, plan units, and regularly monitor their progress in those classes. Schools may use dynamic and innovative structures to support ELs such as flexible scheduling, after school and weekend tutoring, summer school, and extended day to meet the needs of these students.

### **ELs in Gifted and Talented Education (GATE)**

ELs must have access and equal opportunity to meaningfully participate in all of the instructional programs and extracurricular activities available within the school for which they qualify. For instance, unless a particular GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) program or advanced course is demonstrated to require proficiency in English for meaningful participation, schools must ensure that evaluation and testing procedures for GATE or other specialized programs do not screen out ELs because of their limited English proficiency.

### **ELs Who Are Students with Disabilities (ELSWD)**

ELs who may have a disability, like all other students who have a suspected disability and may require services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, must be identified and evaluated for special education services in a timely manner.

To avoid inappropriately identifying ELs as students with disabilities because of their limited English proficiency, ELs must be evaluated in an appropriate language based on the student's needs and language skills.<sup>16</sup> Once appropriately identified, ELs with disabilities must be provided services in both special education and ELD.



Visit [Scenarios: Examples of Districts and Schools Implementing an SEI Program](#)

The linked scenarios highlight practices and approaches presented in the Massachusetts Guidance for Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) Programs. Given the great diversity of Massachusetts districts and their communities, there will also be varying approaches to SEI program implementation.

The Department does not intend for the scenarios to represent full implementation of all ideas proposed in the Guidance, but rather present them as snapshots of what districts and schools can do to put into practice recommendations from the Guidance. As such, the Department has based the scenarios on a mix of what is currently happening in districts in Massachusetts, other states, and national trends in effective English learner education.<sup>17</sup> It is the Department's hope that the scenarios serve as a model and inspire practitioners throughout Massachusetts to plan, act, document, and iterate their own cycles of learning.

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<sup>16</sup> 34 C.F.R. §300.304(c)(1)(ii): "Assessments and other evaluation materials used to assess a child . . . (ii) Are provided and administered in the child's native language or other mode of communication and in the form most likely to yield accurate information on what the child knows and can do academically, developmentally, and functionally, unless it is clearly not feasible to so provide or administer."

<sup>17</sup> For educators and leaders interested in more comprehensive examples of current school-level comprehensive structures and practices supporting ELs, see Castellón, M., Cheuk, T., Greene, R., Mercado-Garcia, D., Santos, M., Skarin, R. & Zerkel, L. (2015). [Schools to Learn From: How Six High Schools Graduate English Language Learners College and Career Ready.](#)



This document was prepared by the  
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