
Identification of Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE)

Guidance Document Outline

I. Overview

Minnesota's Learning English for Academic Proficiency and Success (LEAPS) Act was passed by the Minnesota Legislature in 2014 and has implications for both the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and local education agencies (LEAs). The implementation of this legislation reaches across numerous program areas and across age levels, beginning with prekindergarten services and programs and continuing through high school and higher education. The legislation outlines the responsibilities that the districts have in providing an education to English learners (ELs) that are comprehensive and equitable.

One provision of the LEAPS legislation is to identify SLIFE and to monitor and report their linguistic and academic growth. This guidance document is intended to clarify SLIFE definition, outline the roles and responsibilities of the LEAs related to the identification of SLIFE, and to provide resources for LEAs to better fulfill these requirements. MDE is collecting SLIFE identification data to use in reporting SLIFE English acquisition and academic progress as required in [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.36, Subdivision 1\(e\)](#) (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=120B.36>).

LEAs must use the Student Support Data Collection (SSDC) system to record SLIFE identification and to reclassify students who no longer meet all of the SLIFE criteria. More information is available about [accessing the SSDC website](#) (<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/SchSup/DataSubLogin/StudentSupport/index.htm>). There is a [User Guide](#) (<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/SchSup/EngLearn/SLIFE/index.htm>) on MDE's SLIFE web page to assist with the annual SLIFE identification process. Local student information systems may need to be adjusted for SLIFE identification, and discussions on the best way to record SLIFE identification at the LEA should be researched and defined.

II. SLIFE Definition

In Minnesota, an English learner is identified as SLIFE if all of the following criteria are met:

MN Statute 124D.59 Subd. 2a. **English learner; interrupted formal education.** Consistent with subdivision 2, an English learner includes an English learner with an interrupted formal education who:

- (1) comes from a home where the language usually spoken is other than English, or usually speaks a language other than English;
- (2) enters school in the United States after grade 6
- (3) has at least two years less schooling than the English learner's peers;
- (4) functions at least two years below expected grade level in reading and mathematics; and
- (5) may be preliterate in the English learner's native language.

EFFECTIVE DATE. This section is effective for the 2015–2016 school year and later.

III. Discussion of SLIFE Definition Components

Following is a discussion of each component of Minnesota's SLIFE definition. Some data and practices necessary for SLIFE identification may already exist in some LEAs. In others, these practices may need to be introduced. Resources to assist districts in meeting these obligations are included in Part 5 of this document.

1. Comes from a home where the language usually spoken is other than English, or usually speaks a language other than English

The first aspect of SLIFE identification is in determining the English learner status of the student. Only students identified as English learners in the Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System (MARSS) can be further considered for SLIFE identification. Existing state and federal requirements include determination of the student's home language as part of EL identification. This information is collected using information from the Home Language Questionnaire (HLQ). [Access a sample HLQ.](http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/JustParent/EngLearn/index.html) (<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/JustParent/EngLearn/index.html>). SLIFE identification should take place upon registration at the district level and would include English language proficiency status as determined by the district when each student enrolls. English learners must be identified as soon as possible, preferably before the start of the school year, but no later than 30 days after the start of the year. A student who enrolls after the start of the school year should be identified within 30 days of enrollment. If an EL student transfers from another school district, EL records must transfer from the former school district with the student. The student does not need to be re-identified by the new district. Students may not be placed into a pending identification status; their EL status determination must be made within the required time frames.

2. Enters school in the United States after grade 6

LEAs must determine whether potential SLIFE have entered school in the United States after sixth grade. Potential SLIFE displayed in the SSDC are ELs who do not have a record in a Minnesota school before grade 6. However, MDE does not have the ability to determine whether the students enrolled in Minnesota schools come directly from a country outside the United States or were enrolled in another state in the United States prior to enrollment in public school in Minnesota. Therefore, LEAs must use local information gained through the intake process or a record review to confirm that the student entered school in the United States after grade 6. This information should be obtained as part of the initial registration process and such documentation should be maintained at the LEA. If LEAs are looking to identify SLIFE already enrolled in their school(s), information on prior school attendance can often be found in an electronic record keeping system that is used by the LEA or in a cumulative file, generally kept in the main office of the school where the student attends. Students attending school after grade 6 are considered SLIFE eligible. If a student enters a school in the US before grade 7, he/she will not be SLIFE eligible even if he/she meets other SLIFE criteria.

3. Has at least two years less schooling than the English learner's peers

MDE does not maintain information about the previous schooling of students. If prior school records exist for a potential SLIFE, the district may have the capacity to review the student's prior school records or transcripts to determine whether there is evidence that the student has two years less schooling than his/her peers. If the transcripts are from a foreign country, it may be possible for a school to contact the foreign school to get more information about the student's educational background. If records do not exist, information may be gathered from the student's parents or guardians in the form of an interview questionnaire administered in the preferred language of the parents or guardians or through an oral interview conducted in the preferred language of the parents or guardians using an interpreter that is not a family member of the student. If a parent interview cannot be obtained, then a refugee case worker may be able to answer questions about the student. If necessary, a student interview can be conducted to learn more specifically about the prior educational experience of the student. LEAs have complete responsibility for determining the amount of prior schooling of potential SLIFE students. It is recommended that LEAs have a process in place for reviewing each newly registered EL's prior school records or transcripts to determine whether there is evidence that the student has two years less schooling than the student's peers.

4. Functions at least two years below expected grade level in reading and mathematics

This part of the legislation does not state whether the measurement tools to determine reading and mathematics grade level are administered in English or another language. If available, it would be beneficial for LEAs to use math and reading assessments in the student's native language to find an EL's true abilities without the probable English language interference. A native language writing sample may also help determine the educational abilities of the student. MDE can eliminate certain ELs from the potential

SLIFE category. These are ELs who meet or exceed reading and mathematics expectations as determined by performance on the state standardized tests in mathematics and reading. LEAs may use assessments that have standardized cut scores across the district to determine whether ELs are working two years below grade level in reading and mathematics. Assessments that are not in the first language of the students should include accommodations for ELs that emphasize content knowledge and eliminate language as a barrier for students to demonstrate that content knowledge and ability. LEAs may also identify valid and reliable district or classroom-based assessments to determine whether ELs are working two years below grade level in reading and mathematics

5. May be preliterate in the English learner’s native language

Evidence of students’ ability to read and write at grade level in their first language can provide an indication of ineligibility for SLIFE status but is not a mandatory component. Because of the difficulty inherent in learning academic content and literacy in a second language when one is preliterate in the native language, it is advisable that districts assess the native language literacy of potential SLIFE students.

IV. Considerations for parent and student questionnaires and interviews

The following should be considered when developing a parent/family and student questionnaire for an oral interview.

Parent Oral Interview

Design a practical and concise parent or guardian interview form. In some cases, a refugee resettlement caseworker can be a valuable source of information related to SLIFE identification. An oral interview with a parent or guardian should be conducted in a culturally responsive manner by a community liaison or parent coordinator in the preferred or native language of the parent or guardian or by using an interpreter or telephonic interpretation service. Students, friends, or relatives of the potential SLIFE should not be used as interpreters. Often, the best way to connect with parents and get accurate background information is for the teacher and interpreter to conduct home visits. LEAs that conduct home visits state that this practice is essential to understanding students and to being able to design and deliver SLIFE-appropriate instruction. LEAs should conduct home visits in accordance with their specific district or charter’s policy for home visits.

The following information should be collected about the student:

- Previous education in home country, including type of school, subjects taught, duration of school day and year, number of years attended, or if there were interruptions in school enrollment
- Date of first enrollment in U.S. schools

- Learning history: memory, problem-solving, creativity
- Background experiences before and after arrival in U.S.
- Health concerns
- Trauma experiences
- Literacy in the native or another non-English language

Student Oral Interview

Develop a practical and concise, culturally responsive form for interviewing students in a language they are able to understand about previous experiences and education. Include other questions so that the interview is assets-driven.

The following information should be collected about the student:

- Previous education in home country, including type of school, subjects taught, duration of school day and year, number of years attended, or if there were interruptions in school enrollment
- Date of first enrollment in U.S. schools
- Learning history: memory, problem-solving, creativity
- Background experiences before and after arrival in U.S.
- Health concerns
- Trauma experiences
- Literacy in the native or another non-English language
- What are the student's strengths and abilities (in school and outside of school)
- What are the student's goals for the future

V. Resources to Assist with SLIFE Identification and Instruction

SLIFE identification resources

- Flowchart for SLIFE intake and placement, Massachusetts Department of Education (page 7) Link:
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/SLIFE-Guidance.pdf>
- Calgary Board of Education interview form for families and students. Link:

<http://teachingrefugees.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Interview-for-LEAD-Families-and-Students.pdf>

- DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang book, Meeting the need of students with limited or interrupted schooling. Link:

https://www.press.umich.edu/339205/meeting_the_needs_of_students_with_limited_or_interrupted_schooling

p. 7: Checklist for identifying potential SLIFE

p. 12: Sample questions for parents / guardians for initial assessment of prior educational experiences

p. 14: Sample student interview questions regarding prior schooling

- Massachusetts Department of Education SLIFE Guidance Document. Link:

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/SLIFE-Guidance.pdf>

SLIFE Screening Document: Appendix A, p. 15

SLIFE Interview Document: Appendix B, pp. 16-17

- Low-language Entry Assessment Mathematics Evaluation (EAME), with reference to grade-level skills, from FAST Math, Fairfax County, Virginia. EAME is on pp. 19-40 of document at this link:

<http://www.ncela.us/files/uploads/15/Fastmath1of10.pdf>

SLIFE reference documents

- Calgary, Alberta K-12 website on teaching students with limited formal schooling:

<http://teachingrefugees.com/>

- Colorín Colorado document on educating SLIFE:

<http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/how-support-ell-students-interrupted-formal-education-sifes>

- Indiana Department of Education SLIFE education document. Link:

<http://www.brycs.org/documents/upload/ELLswithInterruptedFormalEducation.pdf>

- Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP), curricular model for SLIFE, developed by Helaine Marshall and Andrea de Capua. Link:
<http://www.malpeducation.com>
- New York City SIFE document. Link:
<http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/ELL/EducatorResources/SIFE.htm>
- New York Department of Education SIFE Document. Link:
<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/biling/docs/NYSEDSIFEGuidelines.pdf>
- Short, D. and Boyson, G. report on Educating Newcomers, for Centers for Applied Linguistics. Link:
https://www.carnegie.org/media/filer_public/ff/fd/ffda48e-4211-44c5-b4ef-86e8b50929d6/ccny_report_2012_helping.pdf
- Utah Schools SIFE document. Link:
<http://www.schools.utah.gov/fsp/ELL-Services/Educator-Resources/InterruptedEducation.aspx>
- Walsh study of Hyde Park High School Newcomer program for SLIFE in Boston, MA. Link:
<https://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/sites/brown.edu.academics.education-alliance/files/publications/HaitianLit.pdf>
- WIDA Focus on SLIFE Brief. Link:
[file:///C:/Users/Jill/Downloads/WIDA_Focus_on_SLIFE%20Final%20\(4\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Jill/Downloads/WIDA_Focus_on_SLIFE%20Final%20(4).pdf)

Scholarly resources

- Bigelow, M. and Tarone, E. The Role of Literacy Level in Second Language Acquisition: Doesn't Who We Study Determine What We Know? Link:
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.2307/3588285/abstract>
- Bigelow, M., and Watson, J.A. (2012). The role of educational level, literacy, and orality in L2 learning.

- In A. Mackey and S. Gass (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 461-75). London and New York: Routledge
- Montero, K. Examining how an early reading instructional intervention with nonliterate and semiliterate adolescent refugees can respond to the cultural needs of non-dominant populations. Link:
https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1GSXalKeigv0jY6bz2dh_r2Zpp-D2V79jPiW3BRZwJeA/edit#slide=id.p12
- Montero, M., Newmaster, S. and Ledger, S. Exploring Early Reading Instructional Strategies to Advance the Print Literacy Development of Adolescent SLIFE. Link:
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/jaal.318/abstract>
- Watson, J.A. Interpreting across the abyss: A hermeneutic study of initial literacy development by high school English Language Learners with Limited Formal Schooling. Link:
http://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/95766/Watson_umn_0130E_11291.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Books

- Bigelow, M. Mogadishu on the Mississippi: Language, racialized identity, and education in a new land. Link:
<http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-1444338749.html>
- DeCapua, A. and Marshall, H.A.. Breaking new ground: Teaching Students with Limited
<http://www.amazon.com/Breaking-New-Ground-Interrupted-Education/dp/0472034529>
- DeCapua, A., Smathers, W., and Tang, L.F. Meeting the needs of students with limited or interrupted schooling. Link:
https://www.press.umich.edu/339205/meeting_the_needs_of_students_with_limited_or_interrupted_schooling
- DeCapua, A. and Wintergest, A. Crossing cultures in the language classroom. Link:

http://www.amazon.com/Crossing-Cultures-Language-Classroom-Michigan/dp/0472089366/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1299373125&sr=1-3

- Flaitz, J. Understanding your refugee and immigrant students. Link:

http://www.press.umich.edu/123975/understanding_your_refugee_and_immigrant_students

Stewar, J. Supporting refugee children: Strategies for educators. Link:

<http://www.utppublishing.com/Supporting-Refugee-Children-Strategies-for-Educators.html>

Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. What if a student comes to our school at the end of 6th grade? Can he/she qualify for SLIFE classification next year?**

A student entering a U.S. school in 6th grade is not SLIFE-eligible.

- 2. What if a student attended a U.S. school in grades K-6, left back to his/her home country, and is now in a U.S. school after 6th grade? Would he/she qualify to be classified as SLIFE?**

A student who previously attended a U.S. school in grade K-6 does not meet the Minnesota SLIFE definition. It is important for a school to be sure to determine the most appropriate programming based on student needs.

- 3. Many of my students are in the U.S. on their own and don't have a parent or guardian, so who can I interview?**

Students may have a refugee resettlement worker, social worker, or another advocate that is helping him/her get settled with housing needs and other services since coming to Minnesota. If the student is under the age of 18, then there should be a responsible adult that may be able to assist with an educational survey. If the student is over 18 without a parent or guardian available, rely on a student survey instead of a parent or guardian survey upon registration.

- 4. Does it help a student to be SLIFE identified?**

SLIFE identification should assist the LEA to determine appropriate programming for these at-risk students. SLIFE identification should not interfere with a student's participation in extracurricular activities nor affect a student negatively in his/her school environment.

- 5. Is there any additional funding available for districts or charters with SLIFE?**

SLIFE generate all funding that every Minnesota student generates. In addition, SLIFE may generate state EL dollars. At this time, there is no additional categorical funding for SLIFE.

- 6. I have students who fit the SLIFE criteria but are in 6th grade or lower. Why aren't they SLIFE-eligible?**

Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.59, Subdivision 2a, defines SLIFE as entering a school in the U.S. after grade 6.

However, schools may enroll students who meet all of the other SLIFE criteria, but are in earlier grades. The LEA will not formally identify the students as SLIFE, but should

have a plan to assist these at-risk students. Special planning supports, and programming to the specific needs of students with limited or interrupted formal education is recommended for students at all grade levels.

7. Does a student need to be an English learner in order to qualify as SLIFE?

A student must be classified as EL in the MARSS system in order to be SLIFE eligible.

8. What if a student demonstrates proficiency on the reading or math standard assessment? Should he/she be reclassified as no longer SLIFE on the SSDC?

A student should be classified as no longer SLIFE on the SSDC when he/she no longer meets the definition of a SLIFE student. If a student no longer functions two years below expected grade level in reading and math, then the student should be reclassified as no longer SLIFE eligible.

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