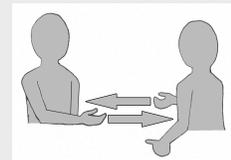


POLICY BRIEF

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES

Models for Family Engagement

Reciprocal Dialogue: Researchers have argued that meaningful family engagement in educational decisions depends on **reciprocal dialogue**, meaning two-way conversations through which educators seek parents’ perspectives on children’s strengths and needs, and parents learn about policies and available services.



Transmission Model: National data indicate that educators generally engage parents in traditional, one-way dialogue. Under this **transmission model**, educators often diagnose students’ academic difficulties and prescribe corresponding support services, with limited or no input from parents.



Special Education and English Learner Policy Envision Different Roles for Parents

For all students with disabilities, including English learner students with disabilities (ELSWDs), the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2015) specifies that parent engagement is a crucial and mandatory component of educational decision-making. As the table below shows, federal law governing EL services differs from IDEA, typically requiring parent notification rather than parent participation.

Decision Point	Role for Parents in Special Education	Role for Parents in English Learner Services
Initial screening	Parents must consent and can initiate.	Family completes home language survey.
Eligibility	Parents must participate in meeting to discuss eligibility.	Districts must notify parents of eligibility. No meeting or parent participation is required.
Educational goals	Parents participate via Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings.	No process exists for parent participation.
Planning for services	Parents participate via IEP meetings.	Parents can waive services.
Assessment	Parents participate via IEP meetings.	Parents notified of English proficiency assessment results.
Exiting services	Parents participate via IEP meetings.	No role defined at federal level. Some states require "parent consultation."

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Schools Typically Use the Transmission Model to Communicate with Families of ELSWDs, but the Schools' Transmissions Are Often Incomplete or Not Received by Parents

We used case study research methods to analyze the experiences of six ELSWDs at the secondary level across three Oregon districts. We interviewed students, their parents, and their teachers over the course of one school year. We also observed students' classes and observed meetings at which decisions were made about whether students would exit EL services. We found that educators typically used the transmission model to communicate with parents of case study students. However, this model seemed not to fulfill even its limited purpose, since parents received fragmented or incomplete information in the following critical areas:

- Nature of their child's difficulties and disability classification.
- Basic information about special education and EL services.
- Parents' own legal rights.
- Specifics of the monitoring process and course changes that would result from exiting EL services.

Parents Get Information about Special Education and English Learner Services From Non-School Sources

Parents of case study students sought out many non-school sources of information about EL services and special education services, mostly from their children and relatives. Educators were often unaware of parents' resourcefulness.

Policy and Practice Implications

Parents of ELSWDs, educators, and family liaisons in our study all expressed a desire to improve home-school dialogue. We offer the following recommendations for maximizing this shared interest:

- * Train educators to initiate and maintain reciprocal dialogue with parents, especially related to parents' expertise on their child's interests, talents, and strengths.
- * Offer parents of ELSWDs more precise and actionable information.
- * Combine meetings about special education and EL services.
- * Train family liaisons to interrupt the transmission model and facilitate reciprocal dialogue.
- * Create videos in students' home languages to explain different types of high school diplomas in Oregon.

ELSWDs Are More Likely To Be Earning a Modified Diploma

In our case study research, three out of four high school ELSWDs were working toward a modified diploma (as opposed to a regular diploma). In all three cases, parents received inaccurate information about the meaning and consequences of this diploma type. Analysis of statewide data showed that ELSWDs are more likely to earn a modified diploma than non-ELs with disabilities.

Percentage of 2017-18 four-year adjusted cohort graduating with modified diploma

	Percentage with modified diploma
ELs with disabilities	30%
Non-ELs with disabilities	20%
All students	3%