Toronto District School Board

English Language Learners

School- Based Considerations Prior to Referral for Psychological Assessment

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This protocol has been adapted from that developed by ERGO (ESL/ELD Resource Group of Ontario) to assist school boards with the implementation of Section 2.3.3 of English Language Learners : ESL/ELD Programs and Services: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12. This section states that *"School boards will develop a protocol for identifying English language learners who may also have special education needs."* [1] The process outlined should be used when there are concerns about the progress of an English language learner.

It is imperative that English language learners who have exceptionalities be identified as soon as possible so that appropriate placement and programming can be arranged. The time needed to complete this process will vary based on individual student needs.

> *"Some students may arrive with already identified special learning needs, while the needs of others are identified when their progress in English language acquisition and cultural adjustment differs significantly from that of students from similar backgrounds and with similar language experiences." (Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8, English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development, A Resource Guide, page 25)*

Who Are English Language Learners?

> *"English language learners are students in provincially funded English language schools whose first language is a language other than English or is a variety of English that is significantly different from the variety used in Ontario's schools and who may require focused educational supports to assist them in attaining proficiency in English. These students may be Canadian born or recently arrived from other countries. They come from diverse backgrounds and school experiences, and have a wide variety of strengths and needs."* [2]

Support Programs for English Language Learners

English language learners in Ontario can receive one of two distinct language support programs where they receive direct support from teachers who specialize in meeting their language learning needs:

- English as a Second language (ESL) programs are for students born in Canada or newcomers whose first language is other than English or is a variety of English significantly different from that used for instruction in Ontario schools.

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[1] Section 2. 3.3 (mandated policy). *English Language Learners: ESL/ELD Programs and Services: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12*, 2007

[2] *Many Roots, Many Voices***,** supporting English language learners in every classroom; A Practical Guide for Educators, Ministry of Education, Queen's printer for Ontario, 2005

- English Literacy Development (ELD) programs are for newcomers whose first language is other than English, or is a variety of English significantly different from that used for instruction in Ontario schools. Students in these programs are from countries where access to education has been limited. The *Literacy Enrichment Academic Program* (LEAP) is a TDSB accelerated ELD program, beginning in grade 4, for students with limited prior schooling.

Provision of Special Education Services to English Language Learners

> *"If information from the student's home country, from initial assessment, or from early teacher observation indicates that the student may have special education needs, the student will be referred to the appropriate school team."* [3]

> *"Where special education needs have been identified, either in the initial assessment or through later assessments, students are eligible for ESL or ELD services and special education services simultaneously."* [4]

Some Considerations Regarding Second Language Acquisition:

- It takes 5-7 years to acquire grade/age appropriate English academic and literacy skills (1-2 years to acquire conversational and day-to-day language proficiency, and 5-7 years for academic language proficiency).
- Canadian-born English language learners may not have developed proficiency in their first language or English to their age appropriate levels and may be at risk.
- Students' academic success may be impacted by the level of literacy of their parents or guardians.
- The acculturation process has a significant impact on students' progress and achievement.
- Current research shows that approximately 12% of the general school population has been identified with exceptionalities (including giftedness) and the proportion of ELLs represented in special education classes should be about the same.
- ELLs must have equitable access to appropriate programming to ensure that they reach their potential.
- Standardized tests should be used with discretion; cultural and/or linguistic bias in tests for newcomers may result in unreliable or invalid data.

The following page outlines a process consisting of three phases detailing considerations that may help determine if psychological assessment should be recommended for English language learners whose progress is of concern.

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[3] Section 2.3.4 (mandated policy) *English Language Learners: ESL/ELD Programs and Services: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12*, 2007.

[4] *English Language Learners: ESL/ELD Programs and Services: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12,* 2007 pg. 19

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Phase I – Initial Assessment and Placement

The following should be included in this process: Classroom Teacher(s), ESL/ELD Teacher, Parents/Guardians, and if needed, an Interpreter.

A. Complete a Newcomer Profile (Elementary/Secondary)

Family History	Educational History	Medical Considerations
- Pre/Post migration experiences	-Prior schooling (continuous/disrupted)	

B. Assess Student's Stage/Level of English Proficiency

C. Determine and Implement an Appropriate Program - Consider the following

- ❑ Adaptations
  - o Modifications (expectations to align with the stages of ESL/ELD)
  - o Accommodations (instructional strategies, resources)
- ❑ Appropriate Assessment (ongoing, formative)
- ❑ Provision of ESL/ELD resource teacher support
- ❑ Application to a LEAP program if the student meets the criteria

Phase II
Refer student to the School Support Team if the English Language Learner is *Not* Progressing In the Adapted Program

Review and gather additional information in the following areas to assess and determine next steps including further program adaptations:

Review Student Information

- ❑ OSR
- ❑ Newcomer Profile
- ❑ First language assessment
- ❑ Academic Gaps

Consider Interpersonal Skills

Observe social skills and acculturation in the following settings:

- ❑ **Classroom**
- ❑ **Peer interaction**
- ❑ **Community**

Collect Information from:

- ❑ Teacher(s):
  - academic progress
  - behaviour/attitude/motivation
- ❑ Student:
  - self concept and social skills
  - learning style
- ❑ Parents/Guardians:
  - first language development
  - *developmental/medical history*
  - access to nutrition and health care

Consider Academic Progress

- ❑ Multiple and current work samples
- ❑ Current assessments
- ❑ Evidence of progress over time
- ❑ Progress across content areas

Implement further program adaptations and continue data collection.

Phase III

Conference with administrator and parents/guardians.
If student continues to experience academic difficulties – Refer to School Support Team for discussion about psychological assessment.

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