



Maryland Guidebook for Supporting Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE)

Division of Instructional Programs/ Multilingual Education Branch

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Maryland Guidebook for Supporting Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education

December 2025

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Executive Summary

The *Maryland Guidebook for Supporting Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE)* provides guidance to local education agencies (LEAs) and schools on how to equitably identify, educate, and support SLIFE students. Aligned with Recommendation 7 of *The Blueprint for Maryland's Future: Workgroup on English Learners in Public Schools* (November 2022), this guidebook fulfills the mandate for a statewide toolkit addressing programming, instruction, and assessment for SLIFE.

SLIFE DEFINITION AND PURPOSE

SLIFE are multilingual learners (MLs)¹, ages 8–21, who have experienced no, limited, or interrupted formal schooling for at least two consecutive years, resulting in academic gaps. While all SLIFE are MLs, not all MLs are SLIFE. The guidebook emphasizes recognizing both the unique strengths SLIFE bring—such as resilience, cultural assets, and problem-solving—and the challenges they may face, including academic gaps, cultural adjustment, and trauma.

KEY FOCUS AREAS

Enrollment and Identification

- LEAs establish culturally responsive, structured intake procedures that include multilingual communication, family interviews, academic background reviews, and foundational assessments.
- Accurate SLIFE identification ensures appropriate services and programming.
- A welcoming environment and orientation are essential to build trust and introduce school routines.

SLIFE Programming

- Effective programming includes explicit instruction in school expectations, foundational literacy and numeracy, and integration of grade-level content with language development.
- Program models may embed SLIFE services within existing ML programs or create dedicated SLIFE programs, depending on local context.
- Scheduling should reflect age-appropriate placement, flexible pathways, individualized planning, and progress monitoring.
- Specialized supports are gradually removed based on clear criteria.

Instructional Practices and Environment

- Instruction for SLIFE should be research-based and asset-focused—leveraging students' languages and experiences, incorporating peer collaboration, and directly teaching academic language, literacy, and numeracy.

¹ It is important to note that Maryland uses the term ML to reflect an asset-based perspective of students who are developing English proficiency. In federal policy and some state assessments, the term English Learner (EL) may still appear. These terms are used interchangeably in this document.

- Safe, culturally responsive environments are essential, emphasizing relationship building, routines, trauma-informed practices, and social-emotional supports.

Family and Community Partnerships

- Schools empower SLIFE families by clearly explaining school systems, expectations, and opportunities—in families' home languages and accessible formats.
- Collaboration with community-based organizations strengthens wraparound supports such as health services, adult education, and immigration assistance.

Implementation and Collaboration

LEAs are encouraged to create SLIFE committees and school-based teams to lead planning, professional learning, data review, and program evaluation. Collaboration among educators, administrators, families, and community partners is critical for ensuring SLIFE receive equitable access to education and achieve academic and personal success.

Introduction and Overview

MARYLAND SLIFE GUIDEBOOK PURPOSE

The purpose of the **Maryland Guidebook for Supporting Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE)** is to share guidance and recommendations to LEAs and schools related to SLIFE. This guidebook is intended for a broad audience.

Recommendation 7 from *The Blueprint for Maryland's Future: Workgroup on English Learners in Public Schools* (November 2022) is focused on supporting SLIFE and specifically calls on the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to “develop a toolkit for Local Education Agencies (LEAs) with guidance and best practices for programming, instruction, and assessment of SLIFE” (p. 103). In addition to *The Blueprint for Maryland's Future*, there are legal requirements related to students' rights that support the need for this guidebook, including:

- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- *Lau v. Nichols* (1974)
- *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981)
- Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA)

The 1974 Supreme Court case *Lau v. Nichols* affirmed that to meet Title VI requirements, school districts must take affirmative actions to ensure that multilingual learners (MLs) can meaningfully participate in education programs (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974). Then, in 1981, the *Castañeda v. Pickard* case set standards for evaluating State Education Agencies' (SEAs) compliance with civil rights laws as it relates to a school district's programs for ML students (*Castañeda v. Pickard*, 1981). Additionally, ESSA strengthened accountability for MLs by requiring states to set English language proficiency standards, track academic and language progress, and include ML performance data in state accountability systems (ESSA, 2015; MSDE, 2022).

Together, these laws and court rulings establish that **MLs, including SLIFE, have a civil right to meaningful access to education, and this guidebook aims to support Maryland LEAs and schools in upholding that right.**

MARYLAND ML AND SLIFE DEFINITION

A **multilingual learner (ML)** is a student who may or may not have been born outside of the U.S.:

- who communicates in a language other than English; or
- whose family uses a primary language other than English in the home; and
- whose English language proficiency falls within the range established by the State for an English language development program (MSDE, n.d.).

Maryland defines **Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE)** as a multilingual learner student with limited or interrupted formal education at the time of enrollment who:

- is 8 to 21 years old, and
- has experienced no, limited, or interrupted formal schooling for at least two consecutive years, resulting in an academic gap.

All SLIFE are MLs, but not all MLs are SLIFE. To fully address the needs of SLIFE, this guidebook includes some recommendations and best practices that apply both specifically to SLIFE and more broadly to MLs. When a recommendation applies broadly to all MLs, it will be clearly noted.

CHARACTERISTICS

SLIFE often enter U.S. schools with limited or interrupted educational experiences caused by factors such as violence or civil unrest, migration, economic hardship, or inadequate access to schooling (DeCapua et al., 2020; DeCapua & Marshall, 2023; OELA, 2023; Salva & Matis, 2025; Yzquierdo, 2017).

While SLIFE are a very diverse group of students with different life experiences, there can be some common strengths and needs across this student population. SLIFE bring valuable assets to their education, including resilience, problem-solving, cultural pride, strong family ties, motivation, and a sense of community.

When SLIFE enter U.S. schools, they often have academic literacy and numeracy skills that are two or more years below grade-level expectations in their home language(s). As a result, they require targeted, intensive support to develop these academic skills (DeCapua & Marshall, 2023). Many SLIFE bring strengths in pragmatic life skills. However, depending on their previous educational experiences, they may have had limited exposure to more decontextualized academic tasks (e.g., engaging with mathematics without context or application, or making comparisons between two texts). As many SLIFE come from collectivist cultures that value cooperation and community, they may benefit from opportunities to explore academic content with peers (DeCapua & Marshall, 2023). These types of oral peer learning activities can also provide a foundation for written academic tasks.

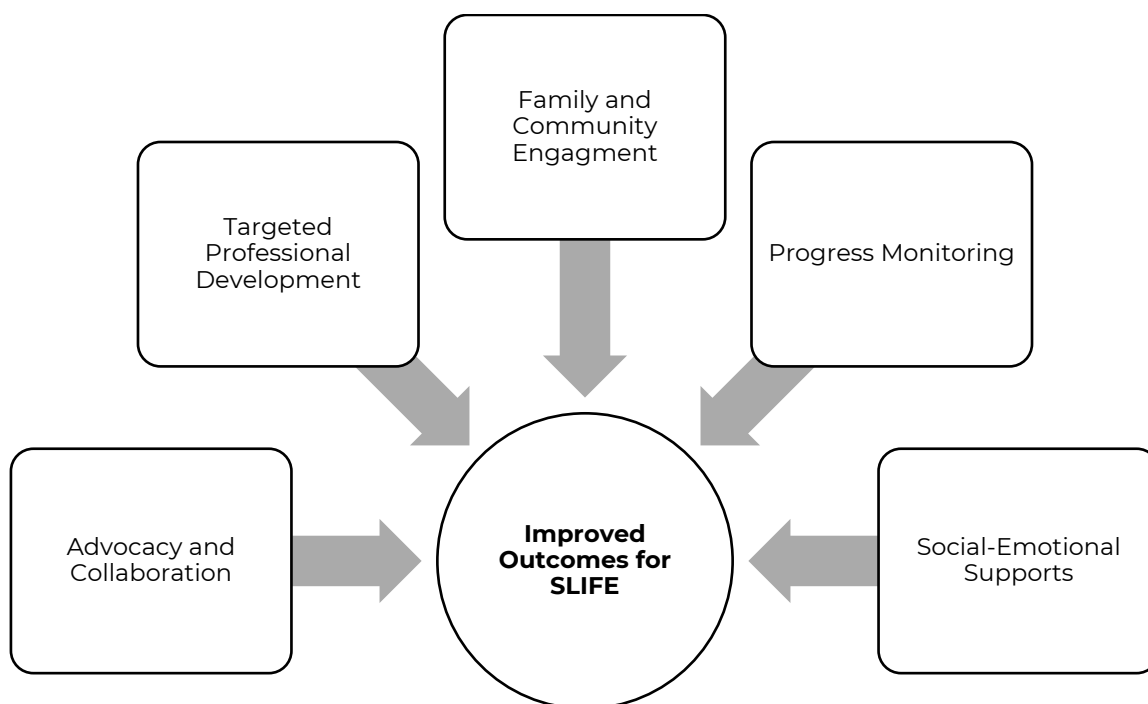
SLIFE may experience cultural dissonance, which is feelings of disorientation and alienation upon entering U.S. schools; it happens when there is a significant change in a person's cultural environment (DeCapua & Marshall, 2023).

Educators should avoid assuming these traits apply to all SLIFE; each student's profile is unique. Recognizing and planning with these characteristics in mind is essential to providing responsive and equitable support.

ADVOCACY AND COLLABORATION

Advocacy and collaboration at the LEA and school level are critical to meeting the needs of SLIFE. Strong advocacy ensures SLIFE receive equitable access to resources, instructional supports, and culturally responsive programming. Collaboration fosters shared responsibility among educators, administrators, counselors, and community partners. Recent studies highlight effective practices – such as collaboration between English Language Development (ELD) and content area teachers, targeted professional development, family and community engagement, progress monitoring, and social-emotional supports – lead to improved outcomes for SLIFE (Salva, 2021; Kray & Burns, 2024). A visual representation of these practices is provided in Figure 1, *Practices for Improving SLIFE Outcomes*.

Figure 1: Practices for Improving SLIFE Outcomes



Implementing these practices requires intentional advocacy and collaboration to build a support system that prioritizes academic success, personal growth, and overall well-being of SLIFE.

Each LEA in Maryland has a different SLIFE context, size, and population. Whereas some LEAs have low enrollment of SLIFE across the LEA or only select schools with SLIFE enrollment, other LEAs have high enrollment of SLIFE across many schools. Due to the vast differences across Maryland LEAs, decisions must be made at the local level for the most effective way to meet the needs of SLIFE. To plan for and ensure advocacy and collaboration take place in support of SLIFE, LEAs may consider creating a LEA SLIFE Committee or assigning the responsibilities of the SLIFE Committee to a pre-existing LEA committee that focuses on ML-related topics. Individual schools with a high incidence of SLIFE can create a School-Based SLIFE Team. Individual schools with a low incidence of SLIFE may embed these responsibilities within other student support structures. In all situations, it is important that multiple staff members collaborate around SLIFE supports. Figure 2, *LEA SLIFE Committees and School-Based SLIFE Teams*, outlines the purpose of each collaborative group along with potential group members.

Figure 2: LEA SLIFE Committee and School-Based SLIFE Teams

Collaborative Group	Purpose	Potential Group Members
LEA SLIFE Committee	• Review the Maryland Guidebook for Supporting SLIFE • Reflect on current practices to determine next steps • Develop a LEA SLIFE plan that includes tools, procedures, and protocols to support schools with the implementation of best practices	• ML director or coordinator • Content area representatives • Special education office representative • Student and family support leaders (e.g., family outreach coordinator) • Teacher leaders with SLIFE expertise • Select community partners • SLIFE student and family representatives
School-Based SLIFE Team	• Implement LEA SLIFE plans at the school level • Support school-based professional development on SLIFE-related topics • Monitor individual SLIFE progress	• ELD teachers • Grade-level, math, literacy, and content teachers • Administrators • Counselors • Social workers • Family liaisons • Special education teachers • Select community partners • SLIFE student and family representatives

GUIDEBOOK STRUCTURE AND APPLICATION

This guidebook includes three focus areas:

- Enrollment and Identification
- SLIFE Programming
- Family and Community Partnerships

As you review this guidebook:

- Keep your specific role (e.g., ELD teacher, counselor, administrator, LEA SLIFE Committee, School-Based SLIFE Team) and context (i.e., grade level, SLIFE population size) in mind.
- Consider how the recommendations and guidance may be implemented within the context of your LEA or school.
- Explore external links to relevant resources included at the end of each focus area section and in the appendix to further support your work with SLIFE.

Contact the MSDE Office of Multilingual Education if you would like additional technical assistance related to SLIFE.

Enrollment and Identification

ENROLLMENT AND IDENTIFICATION SECTION OVERVIEW

All K–12 students in the United States have a legal right to attend public school, regardless of their own immigration status or that of their parents or guardians (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982).

The enrollment and identification process for SLIFE is often the first interaction students and families² have with LEAs and schools. During this process, schools collect data critical to identifying students as SLIFE and making programming decisions. SLIFE must be properly identified to ensure they receive the programming and services they need to be successful.

SLIFE families often lack familiarity with U.S. schools. The enrollment and identification process is a time to inform them about the services and supports that the LEA provides. It is important to intentionally build trust and create a welcoming, safe environment during this process.

This section provides information to support LEAs and schools with:

- developing a structured protocol for initial student intake and enrollment meetings, including selecting an appropriate location for these meetings,
- creating a process and materials for screening to determine SLIFE designation, and
- planning a welcoming and comprehensive school orientation for SLIFE.

INTAKE AND ENROLLMENT CONSIDERATIONS

To support SLIFE enrollment, LEAs should implement clear procedures and a structured protocol for intake and enrollment meetings. Protocols should be accessible year-round and conducted in a language students and families understand, with a trained bilingual staff member or interpreter. LEAs should define responsibilities at the local level for each step of the process. Procedures, protocols, and responsibilities will be dependent on each LEA's unique context (e.g., high-incidence vs. low-incidence SLIFE populations).

Key strategies necessary for providing culturally responsive intake and enrollment meetings for potential SLIFE and their families include:

² For the purposes of this guidebook, we use the term 'family' to identify parents, guardians, or other extended family members, such as a grandparent, aunt, or uncle, who live with the student or are legally responsible for the student's well-being.

Hire multilingual staff. Prioritize staff who understand SLIFE families' experiences. First interactions should be welcoming and empathetic, as most SLIFE families are unfamiliar with the U.S. school system.

Train staff in culturally responsive practices. Staff members responsible for conducting intake and enrollment processes benefit from training to support them in understanding the unique experiences of SLIFE families, strategies for initiating strong partnerships with these families, and school and community resources SLIFE families may need. Use case studies and role plays to prepare staff to meet linguistic and social-emotional needs.

Provide clear information and offer additional resources. During the meetings, intake and enrollment staff should provide clear information on enrollment requirements (e.g., medical paperwork, proof of residence, emergency contacts) and assist families in completing them (e.g., offering vaccine clinics). Partner with community organizations to offer additional support, such as school supplies or access to local services (e.g., food pantry).

Re-examine intake location. An important decision is where to conduct intake and enrollment to best support ML students and families, including potential SLIFE students and their families. Figure 3, *Intake and Enrollment Location Benefits and Challenges*, provides options for intake locations along with key considerations related to each location.

Figure 3: Intake and Enrollment Location Benefits and Challenges

Intake Location Options	Benefits	Challenges
Create a centralized ML intake center	- Provides a more specialized intake process designed to meet the unique needs of SLIFE and MLs new to the U.S. - Is an opportunity to hire multilingual staff trained in SLIFE best practices - Is a dedicated safe and welcoming space for SLIFE families - Can provide access to additional resources families may need (e.g., school supplies, information on community resources)	- May be far from students' homes and difficult to access if families do not have transportation - Can lead to feelings of isolation or exclusion from the students' local school - Can lead to issues with information sharing and communication between the intake center and the receiving school
Register all students at their local school	- Location may be more accessible for families - Allows for immediate relationship building with school staff	- Requires training of all school intake staff in SLIFE best practices - Can lead to greater inconsistency in intake processes across schools

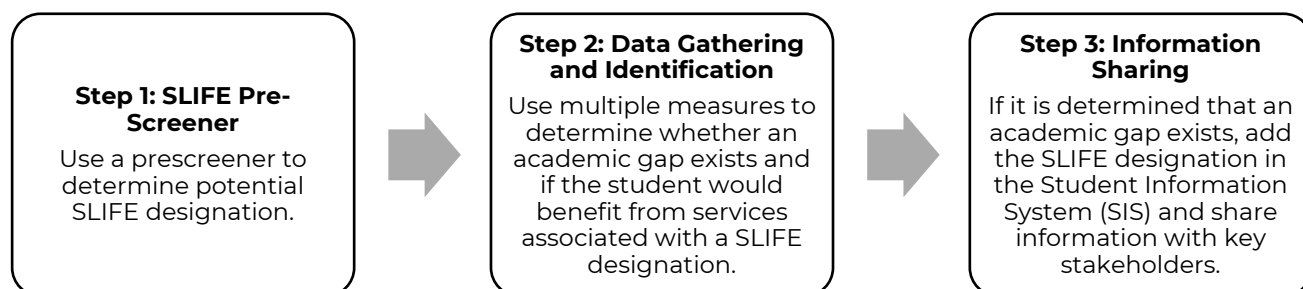
Intake Location Options	Benefits	Challenges
	Supports feelings of inclusion within the local school community	Can result in less access to multilingual staff members for intake and enrollment

Sources: Motamedi et al., 2021; Sugarman, 2017

SCREENING AND IDENTIFICATION

To make decisions around SLIFE designation, LEAs should develop a systematic process for identifying SLIFE based on Maryland's definition of SLIFE. The process should include an initial screening process, academic reviews, interviews with students and families, and assessments. **This process should only take place after a student is identified as an ML.** Figure 4, *SLIFE Identification Process Overview*, outlines the process for determining an ML student's SLIFE designation. LEA SLIFE Committees should consider creating a flowchart to guide the screening and identification of SLIFE and include this tool in their SLIFE Plan.

Figure 4: SLIFE Identification Process Overview



Use the following guidance to support each step of the SLIFE screening and identification process. Figure 5, *Other States' Sample Tools to Support Screening and Identification*, provides direct links to tools that LEAs and schools can adapt to use in their context for SLIFE screening and identification.

Step 1: SLIFE Pre-Screener

Use a pre-screener to determine potential SLIFE designation.

- Begin by noting if:
 - a student is identified as an ML,
 - is between the ages of 8 and 21 years old, and
 - has experienced no, limited, or interrupted formal schooling for at least two consecutive years.
- Conduct an initial academic records review to determine the number of years and grade levels the student has attended school. If school records are incomplete, conduct an educational background review interview to learn more about the student's previous schooling. An

educational background review focuses solely on identifying if the student has experienced no, limited, or interrupted formal schooling. Using data from the review, determine if the student appears to have an academic gap in their education and may benefit from SLIFE-related services and support. If so, move on to Step 2 to gather additional data.

Step 2: Data Gathering and Identification

Use multiple data points, including an **in-depth review of student records and transcripts, oral interviews, and assessments**, to determine whether an academic gap exists and if the student would benefit from services associated with a SLIFE designation. Document all findings in writing and be aware that some information related to limited and interrupted schooling may come to light after the intake process as educators and schools get to know individual students.

- **Review student records and transcripts (if available).** Develop a clear system for reviewing international student records to inform SLIFE designation. This system should also guide the appropriate selection of services and supports (including special education and gifted and talented programs), the awarding of credits, and the scheduling of students. This process should follow LEA procedures for awarding credits or inform updates to current LEA procedures to include evaluating international transcripts and steps to take if no transcripts or records are available (e.g., family and student interviews, awarding credit based on placement tests).
- **Conduct oral interviews with students and families.** Conduct oral interviews with potential SLIFE students and families in their home language to determine students' backgrounds and discuss educational goals. This interview is also a time to begin to build collaborative relationships with families and to identify additional support that families and/or students may need. The topics of these interviews can include background, previous schooling experiences, interests and goals, current living situation, and literacy, numeracy, and technology practices. Families may be hesitant or uncomfortable sharing information requested during interviews. As it is important to gather the most accurate information possible, it is critical that staff responsible for intake and enrollment are trained in culturally responsive practices for working with SLIFE families and understand the importance of gathering correct information.
- **Assess students to identify services and course placement.** Administer foundational literacy and math³ assessments to potential SLIFE in the student's home language (as available). These home language assessments can help determine foundational literacy and math skills and needs in order to appropriately schedule students, provide needed instructional supports, and identify transferable skills. These assessments can be formal assessments that a LEA develops or adopts to measure home language proficiency (e.g., oral proficiency, vocabulary, reading, writing, and math). They could also be informal assessments, such as asking a student to write a response on a familiar topic or having a conversation with a trained staff member in their home language (Motamedi et al., 2021). If possible, consider staggering the administration of these assessments. When making service and placement decisions, keep in mind that grade-level placement should be based on age, not educational level (e.g., a student who is age-

³ Math assessments should be aligned to the MSDE Numeracy Development Framework (2025) to determine grade-level mastery of benchmarks and limit disruptions to math course scheduling after enrollment.

appropriate for 5th grade but has no prior formal schooling should be placed in 5th grade and provided with the necessary instructional supports to access grade-level content).

Step 3: Information Sharing

If it is determined that an academic gap exists, add the SLIFE designation in SIS and share information with key stakeholders. Create written procedures for sharing information about new SLIFE. These procedures should include how and when to flag the SLIFE designation in SIS.

- **Develop a protocol to identify SLIFE designation within the LEA's SIS.** This protocol should include identifying a staff member responsible for updating SLIFE designation within the LEA's SIS. Note that MSDE collects the number of SLIFE students in the October Enrollment File. To ensure students receive appropriate support, LEAs should maintain a record of SLIFE designation in SIS.
- **Develop a clear and efficient process for alerting schools and key stakeholders (e.g., ELD teachers, classroom teachers, counselors, social workers, special educators) when they are receiving a new SLIFE into their school and classroom.** Share relevant information about the student, including their home county, language(s) spoken, home language literacy, prior educational experiences, interests, and goals.

Figure 5: Other States' Sample Tools to Support SLIFE screening and identification

Link	Sample Tools Available
Massachusetts: Guidance for SLIFE Identification, Services, and Support	• Pre-screening tools • Educational background review • Interview questions • Academic screening resources
Minnesota: SLIFE Website	• Identification checklist • Student interview questions • Parent interview questions
Mississippi: Supports for SLIFE	• Pre-screening tools • Educational background review • Student interview • Academic assessments resources
New York: SLIFE Resources	• Oral interview questionnaire (in multiple languages) • Writing screener (in multiple languages)
Virginia: SLIFE Website	• Pre-screening tools

WELCOMING AND COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL ORIENTATION

Upon enrollment, schools should provide students and families with a clear and comprehensive orientation of their new school (Motamedi et al., 2021). This is important for all ML families, particularly SLIFE and other newly arrived immigrant families, who may be less familiar with the U.S. school system and require additional support in understanding expectations and procedures. Figure 6, *Recommendations for a Welcoming and Comprehensive School Orientation*, provides recommendations for ensuring a welcoming and comprehensive school orientation for SLIFE and their families.

Figure 6. Recommendations for a Welcoming and Comprehensive School Orientation

Recommendation	Description
Provide schools and teachers with information on best practices for welcoming SLIFE and supporting their academic and social-emotional needs.	• Task the School-Based SLIFE Team to learn about best practices and provide turnaround training to staff. • LEA SLIFE Committees can consider creating a one-page information sheet to share with schools and teachers on best practices. This may be especially helpful for LEAs with a low incidence of MLs and SLIFE. • See the <i>SLIFE Programming</i> section of this guidebook for additional information on best practices for SLIFE services and support.
Explain all essential information about school policies and procedures to families in their home language and in a manner (e.g., orally and/or written) that is accessible to them.	• Ensure families have a way of contacting a school staff member with any questions they may have about policies and procedures. • The Maryland State Advisory Council for English Learners created “A Guide to School for Families of English Learners” (2022). It includes information on numerous school-related topics, including enrolling in school, ELD programming, special education services, gifted and talented programs, school policies, and educational opportunities for parents. The guide is available in Amharic, Arabic, Chinese, English, French, and Spanish and could be a helpful tool in sharing this information. • Consider creating short videos for families to explain key information – this is especially helpful for families that may still be developing literacy skills.
Conduct a school tour for students and families in their home language.	• Utilize trained bilingual staff members and interpreters to conduct initial school tours. • Consider having a cohort of students to help facilitate these tours. Cohorts could be centralized at the LEA

Recommendation	Description
	level or school-based depending on the needs and size of the LEA.
Develop a student ambassador or peer buddy program that supports new students in learning about the school and routines.	- Match new students and ambassadors or peer buddies based on select criteria, such as shared home language, culture, grade levels, and/or interests. - Train student ambassadors and peer buddies so that they understand how the experiences of SLIFE may be different from those of other new students.
Identify and train staff to support newly enrolled SLIFE.	Ensure that all SLIFE, including those who begin after the start of the school year, receive regular check-in meetings during the first month or two from their school start date from staff members trained in working with SLIFE.

ENROLLMENT AND IDENTIFICATION RESOURCE LINKS

The following links provide access to resources and tools related to enrollment and identification of SLIFE that can be adapted to fit the needs of your LEA. Please note that the links provided are subject to change. The continued accuracy or availability of external websites or their content cannot be guaranteed.

- [Finding the Right Starting Point: Obtaining, Interpreting, and Evaluating International Transcripts \(Institute of Education Sciences & Regional Education Lab Northwest\)](#)

This infographic describes a process to evaluate foreign transcripts.

- [Getting it Right: Reference Guides for Registering Students with Non-English Names \(Institute of Education Sciences & Regional Education Lab Northwest\)](#)

This resource is designed to help schools accurately and consistently record student's names in student data systems.

- [How to Support ELL Students with Interrupted Formal Education \(Colorín Colorado\)](#)

This resource provides information on best practices for supporting SLIFE, including information on who SLIFE are, what they need, teaching ideas, and ideas for providing school-wide support to SLIFE.

- [Metropolitan Area Foreign Student Advisors](#)

Metropolitan Area Foreign Student Advisors, or MAFSA, provides support and resources to schools and LEAs in Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia around the proper grade placement and evaluation of records for international and ML students.

- [Massachusetts Guidance for SLIFE Identification, Services, and Support \(MA DESE, 2024\)](#)

This resource provides sample tools for screening students for SLIFE designation, including a pre-screener, educational background review, sample SLIFE interview questions, and links to sample academic screening resources.

- [Minnesota: SLIFE Website](#)

This site provides Minnesota's definition of SLIFE, several learning modules related to supporting SLIFE, and sample SLIFE tools, including an identification checklist and student and parent interview questions.

- [Mississippi: Supports for English Learner Students with Limited or Inconsistent/Interrupted Formal Education \(SLIFE\)](#)

This guidebook provides information and tools for supporting SLIFE in Mississippi schools, including sample tools to support the pre-screening process, family interviews, and academic assessments.

- [ML Newcomer and SLIFE Intake and Enrollment Checklist \(SupportEd\)](#)

This checklist outlines key criteria to address during SLIFE intake and enrollment. It can be used as a monitoring tool.

- [Newcomer Toolkit \(U.S. Department of Education\)](#)

This resource is designed to help U.S. educators and staff who work directly with immigrant students and their families. Chapters 1 – 2 address topics related to enrollment and identification.

- [New York State Department of Education Students with Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education \(SIFE\) Resources](#)

This website includes a sample SIFE Oral Interview Questionnaire and SIFE Writing Screener, both available in multiple languages.

- [SLIFE Program Review Planning Tool \(SupportEd\)](#)

This tool provides a process to annually review SLIFE programs for alignment with current research-based practices.

- [Virginia: Supporting Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Schooling \(SLIFE\) Guidebook](#)

This guidebook provides information for Virginia schools about identifying SLIFE and providing equitable opportunities and support. It includes sample resources for intake and enrollment, including screening and interview questions.

- [Welcoming, Registering, and Supporting Newcomer Students: A Toolkit for Educators of Immigrant and Refugee Students in Secondary Schools \(Institute of Education Sciences & Regional Education Lab Northwest\)](#)

This resource is intended to help educators and other stakeholders identify and use research-based practices, policies, and procedures for welcoming, registering, and supporting newcomer immigrant and refugee students who are attending secondary schools (grades 6-12) in the United States. Sections 1 and 2 are specific to intake and enrollment.

SLIFE Programming

SLIFE PROGRAMMING SECTION OVERVIEW

SLIFE benefit from programming that is designed for their unique needs (Umansky et al., 2018). They also benefit from small class sizes that allow tailored instruction (Pentón Herrera, 2022) and flexible programming and scheduling to support varied needs and goals (Kray & Burns, 2024). While ML program models provide some support for SLIFE, they often do not fully address the unique needs of SLIFE. SLIFE programming should:

- Explicitly teach school and classroom expectations and procedures.
- Provide targeted foundational literacy and numeracy instruction.
- Incorporate cooperative peer learning activities to support access to academic content and to build language and literacy skills.
- Purposefully connect academic concepts to students' lived experiences.
- Include individual planning around pathways and goals.

This section provides information to support LEAs and schools with:

- Selecting a program model,
- Making placement and scheduling decisions at the elementary and secondary levels,
- Developing a plan for progress monitoring and the gradual removal of SLIFE supports,
- Identifying effective instructional practices, including specific considerations for literacy and numeracy instruction, and
- Intentionally creating a safe and supportive learning environment for SLIFE.

Appendix A, *SLIFE Programming Decision-Making Tool*, offers guiding questions to support LEA SLIFE Committees and School-Based SLIFE Teams in planning, refining, and evaluating their SLIFE programming.

PROGRAM MODELS

LEAs and schools should review their current ELD instructional models (e.g., newcomer programming, dual language, transitional bilingual, sheltered English immersion, content-based ELD, stand-alone ELD) and adapt them to provide specialized support for SLIFE (Umansky et al., 2018; Center for Applied Linguistics, 2022). While LEAs or schools with low-SLIFE enrollment may find it more challenging to have robust programming for SLIFE, they may have greater opportunities to offer individualized attention, tailored instruction, and greater flexibility in scheduling (AIR, 2024; Cohan & Honigsfeld, 2017; Hos & Kaplan-Wolff, 2020).

When designing or evaluating a SLIFE program, ensure students receive:

- Access to scaffolded grade-level content that is sufficiently differentiated.
- Language development instruction that is integrated with academic content.
- Targeted foundational literacy and mathematics instructions based on their unique needs.

Depending on LEA size and the resources available, LEAs may:

- Place SLIFE within existing ELD programs with additional specialized supports, or
- Design dedicated SLIFE programs.

Regardless of the program model, it must:

- Be implemented in the least segregated setting possible while still meeting students' educational goals.
- Ensure that students are not retained in specialized programs longer than necessary to meet program goals.
- Provide targeted support that enables timely integration into general education.
- Prioritize educator collaboration by providing scheduled collaboration time, collaboration tools and resources, and clear guidance on expected outcomes.

To evaluate the program, the LEA SLIFE Committee or School-Based SLIFE Team should:

- Review available program model options considering SLIFE population, program goals, and student needs.
- Analyze student growth and performance data.
- Conduct student focus groups.
- Use SLIFE shadowing⁴ to identify program strengths and areas for growth.

⁴ SLIFE shadowing is a structured observation protocol in which an educator follows ("shadows") a student throughout their school day or across several class periods to take notes on student engagement and learning to inform decision-making around instruction and program design (Soto, 2021).

PLACEMENT AND SCHEDULING

The LEA SLIFE Committee can review and establish specific recommendations for class placement, scheduling, course pathway selection, and the implementation of individualized learning plans for SLIFE (Umansky et al., 2018).

Figure 7, *Elementary SLIFE Placement Considerations*, outlines key considerations to keep in mind when planning for elementary SLIFE placement.

Figure 7: Elementary SLIFE Placement Consideration

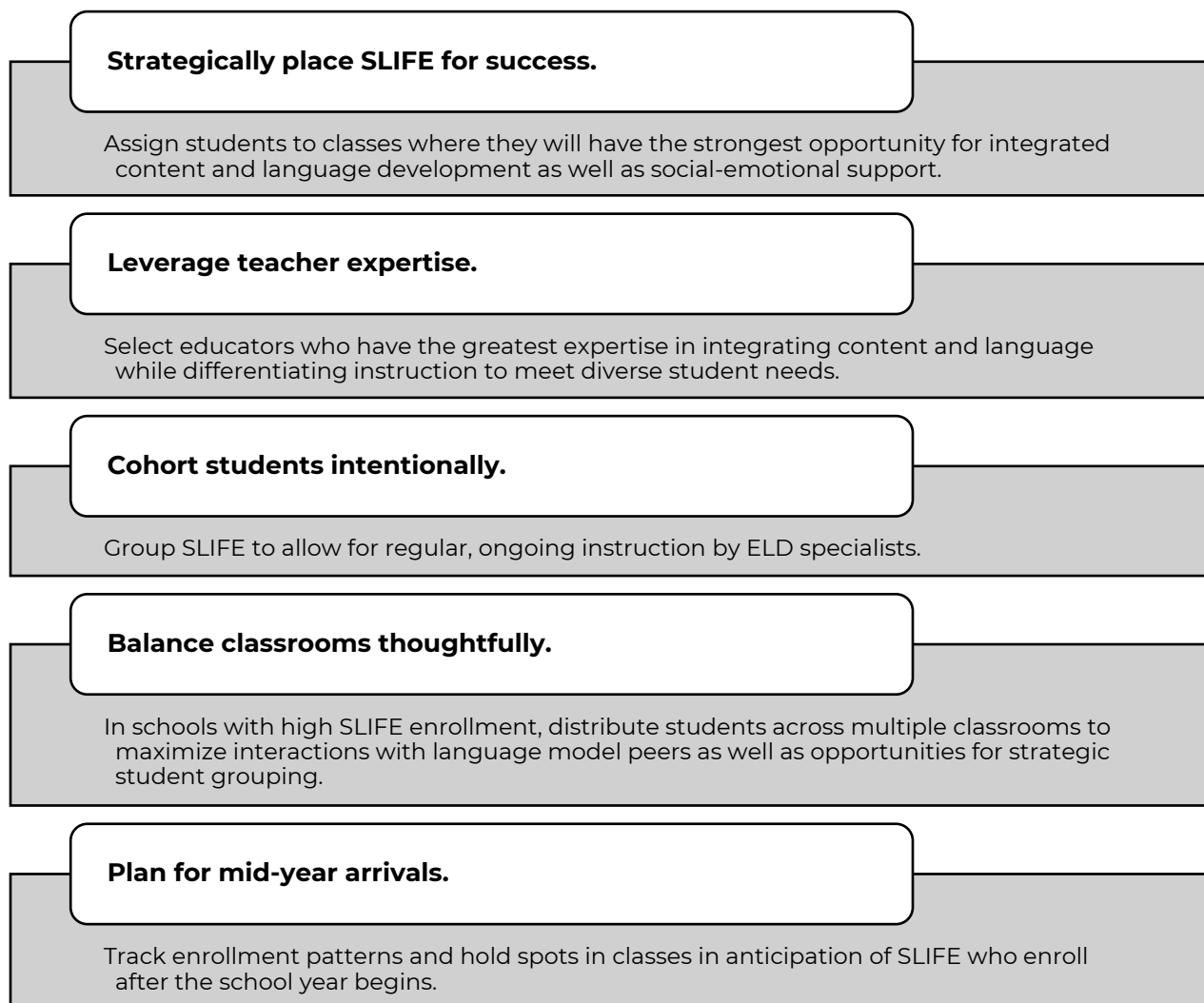
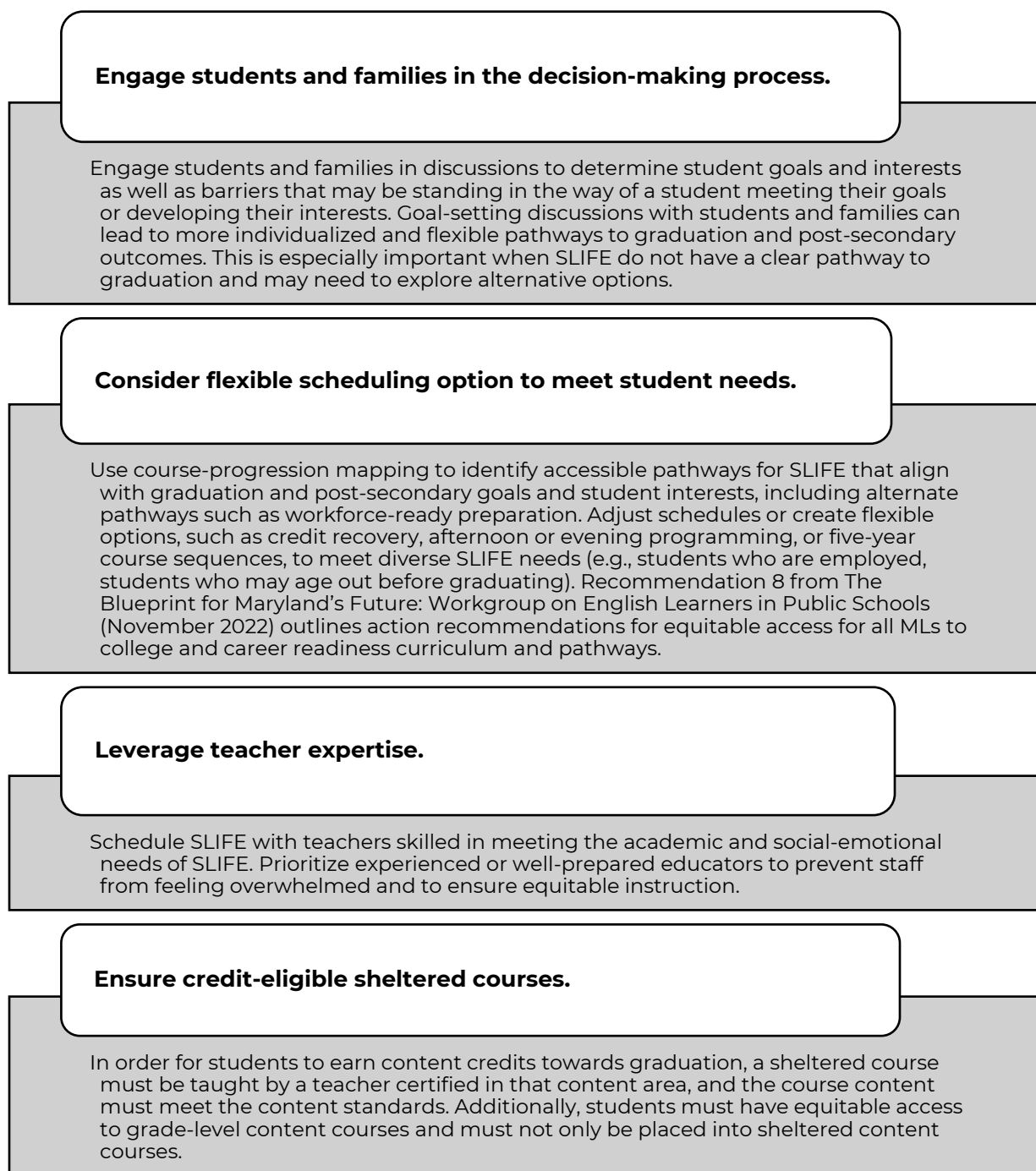


Figure 8, *Secondary SLIFE Scheduling Considerations*, outlines key considerations to keep in mind when planning secondary SLIFE scheduling.

Figure 8: Secondary SLIFE Scheduling Considerations⁵



⁵ Maryland law (Education Article §7-101) entitles all resident students from age 5 through age 20 to a free public education, which means students may enroll and receive services until they turn 21. Schools may not deny enrollment to older multilingual learners or SLIFE students because they have limited credits, interrupted schooling, or may not graduate on time. All students under 21 must be admitted and provided full access to ML/ELD services, appropriate coursework, and alternative pathways. This ensures that older newcomers receive equitable opportunities to progress academically and linguistically in Maryland schools.

PROGRESS MONITORING AND REMOVING SLIFE-SPECIFIC SUPPORTS

To ensure that SLIFE can meet their personal and academic goals, monitor their progress and remove SLIFE-specific supports when students meet particular criteria set by the LEA SLIFE Committee. Figure 9, *SLIFE Progress Monitoring and Transition Considerations*, outlines actions LEAs and schools should take in monitoring SLIFE progress.

Figure 9. SLIFE Progress Monitoring and Transition Considerations

Action	Description
Set criteria for removing SLIFE supports	- Establish clear criteria for removing SLIFE-specific supports, with procedures that allow students to transition out of sheltered SLIFE classes at the end of a marking period rather than maintaining supports for the full instructional year when appropriate. - The LEA SLIFE Committee should determine what criteria will help the school-based SLIFE team in determining when students are ready to have intensive SLIFE support removed. Consider what type of information will describe students' progress academically, linguistically, and socio-emotionally and clearly articulate what the student should demonstrate in order to have SLIFE supports removed. - Criteria may include academic performance data from local benchmark assessments, language proficiency data, and attendance, as well as observations and recommendations from teachers.
Monitor student progress regularly	- Collect and review student data regularly to monitor academic, linguistic, and socio-emotional progress, and adjust programming as needed. For instance, math teachers may use the MSDE Numeracy Development Framework (2025) to monitor students' progress towards mastery of grade-level numeracy skills. - Begin by collecting baseline data to understand where students are when they enter the LEA (Cohan & Honigsfeld, 2017). A variety of progress monitoring tools, such as classroom assessments, observations, and student work samples, can be used. - During progress monitoring meetings, School-Based SLIFE Teams can also review students' ML Plan and discuss what adjustments are needed.
Review progress annually	Conduct annual reviews of individual SLIFE student data to make appropriate programming decisions and to determine whether it is appropriate to remove intensive SLIFE supports. This review should be based on the criteria as determined by the LEA SLIFE Committee and implemented by the school-based SLIFE team.
Implement smooth transition process	Implement a smooth transition process when removing intensive SLIFE support. Transition strategies might include the gradual removal of scaffolded instructional supports, classroom and school visits to non-SLIFE classes and

Action	Description
	programs, student mentors, opportunities to audit a course, and cross-program teacher meetings (e.g., ELD teachers and ELA teachers).

STAFFING AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Effective support for SLIFE depends on intentional staffing and sustained professional learning to ensure that educators are well-prepared and consistently supported in their practice. Figure 10, *SLIFE Staffing and Professional Learning Plan*, identifies actions LEAs and schools can take to support effective SLIFE staffing.

Figure 10. SLIFE Staffing and Professional Learning Plan

Action	Description
Recruit and retain qualified educators	• Leverage Maryland Blueprint Pillar 2 by prioritizing hiring and retaining teachers with training and experience in working with SLIFE. • Incorporate questions about experience in teaching SLIFE and understanding of SLIFE backgrounds into interview protocols. • To retain qualified educators, provide opportunities for teacher leadership, and actively respond to teachers' ideas and concerns about SLIFE programming. • In addition to offering financial incentives for National Board Certification and advanced degree coursework, celebrate teachers' successes in supporting SLIFE.
Design SLIFE-focused professional learning	• Provide ML-focused professional learning for all teachers that includes practices and examples specific to the needs of SLIFE. • Embed an explicit focus on SLIFE-related topics within your LEA or school ML professional learning plan. Align the learning with the program model, program goals, and other LEA or school initiatives if appropriate. • For LEAs or schools with a dedicated SLIFE program, provide intensive professional learning and coaching for teachers in the program and offer SLIFE-focused professional learning for all educators to prepare them for working with students transitioning out of the program. • For LEAs or schools without a dedicated SLIFE program, consider creating a cohort model in which educators working with SLIFE receive regular opportunities for professional learning and ongoing coaching.

Action	Description
Ensure cross-content collaboration and consistency	- Establish regular collaboration opportunities so that scaffolds, routines, and language supports are implemented consistently across grade levels and content areas. - During common planning times, members of School-Based SLIFE Teams can meet with teams of educators to share resources and recommendations as well as to discuss the specific needs of SLIFE learners in their schools.
Provide literacy-focused professional learning for secondary content teachers	- Offer explicit professional learning on embedding scaffolded literacy opportunities into lessons, as secondary teachers may have limited training in literacy instruction. - Share strategies and supports for fostering academic language development, reading comprehension, and academic writing within content areas.
Provide role-specific professional learning	- Provide educators in different roles professional learning that is specific to their responsibilities in supporting SLIFE, such as developing an understanding of the MSDE Numeracy Development Framework (2025) benchmarks or practices for implementing effective intervention strategies. - Professional learning should include opportunities to discuss tools, strategies, and case studies relevant to participant roles.

EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

Effective instruction for SLIFE should be grounded in research-based practices for MLs but should also be augmented to build on the specific strengths that SLIFE bring to the classroom as well as respond to their academic and social-emotional needs.

The [U.S. Department of Education's 2025 Implementing Evidence-Based Instructional Practices for English Learners](#) outlines five evidence-based instructional practices to support MLs in accessing grade-level content while simultaneously developing English language proficiency. The recommendations include:

1. Provide MLs with opportunities to build content knowledge and language competence in tandem.
2. Leverage MLs' home language, prior knowledge, and cultural assets.
3. Engage MLs in productive interactions with peers.
4. Provide direct and explicit instruction focusing on key aspects of literacy.
5. Incorporate regular opportunities to develop written language skills.

Appendix B, *Evidence-Based Instructional Practices for Multilingual Learners and Considerations for SLIFE*, presents an explanation of each instructional practice along with specific considerations for addressing the unique

backgrounds, strengths, and needs of SLIFE. Appendix C, *Elementary and Secondary Instructional Practice Examples*, provides short vignettes of how these recommendations might be applied in an elementary and secondary context.

SLIFE Literacy and Numeracy Instruction Considerations

In addition to research-based content and language instruction, many SLIFE also need explicit instruction in foundational literacy and/or numeracy that builds on their existing skills (Kray & Burns, 2024). Figure 11, *SLIFE Literacy and Numeracy Instruction Considerations*, outlines considerations for implementing effective foundational literacy and numeracy instruction for SLIFE.

Figure 11: SLIFE Literacy and Numeracy Instruction Considerations

Consideration	Description
Assess student needs	- SLIFE come with varying degrees of experience with formal education and are at different stages in their literacy and mathematical skills development. - Use a variety of assessment tools (e.g., home language when available, modified assessments) to determine literacy and math skill gaps. - Refer to the Intake and Enrollment section of this guidebook for more information.
Strategically group students	- Organize students into groups to provide targeted instruction in the skills that students need (e.g., phonics instruction, adding and subtracting two-digit numbers). - The more tailored this instruction is to respond to their specific learning needs, the more rapidly they will develop these foundational skills. - Ensure that SLIFE have access to Tier 1 on grade-level instruction in addition to any intervention.
Implement research-based literacy strategies	- Provide comprehensive literacy instruction, including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, writing, and oral language development that builds on students' existing literacy skills. - Discuss the importance of reading fluency and track progress with students (Salva & Matis, 2025). - Connect oral language activities to reading and writing. For example, teachers can co-construct text with students through a language experience approach in which students work with the teacher to develop a shared text and then use the text to practice their reading skills.

Consideration	Description
	Support emergent writers with listing, labeling, copying, and collaborative writing (Salva & Matis, 2025).
Implement research-based strategies to support the development of foundational math skills	- SLIFE may have uneven skill development in mathematics as well as real-world mathematical skills that can be built upon as students learn to engage in mathematical learning tasks required at school. - Build conceptual understanding of mathematical concepts using manipulatives. - Provide explicit vocabulary instruction to support comprehension of math language. - Provide opportunities for academic language practice to support SLIFE in being able to explain their thinking in math. - Include frequent comprehension checks (e.g., exit tickets, whiteboards, Three Reads Protocol⁶). - Leverage the MSDE Numeracy Development Framework (2025) to plan for instruction based on students' individual needs.
Consider educator qualifications and training	Intensive literacy and numeracy instruction for SLIFE is best provided by well-trained staff, such as a literacy specialist, literacy or math interventionist, or other appropriately trained staff.

SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Creating supportive and caring environments for SLIFE is urgent, as many have faced significant social and emotional challenges due to trauma in their home country, during migration, and after arriving in the U.S. The stress of learning about and adapting to a new culture can result in increased anxiety and depression in SLIFE learners (Sirin et al., 2013; Thibeault et al., 2017).

To support SLIFE well-being and success:

- Create a welcoming environment that fosters safety and belonging (Kray & Burns, 2024; Salva, 2021).
- Develop strong relationships between teachers and students and among peers to support social-emotional development and intrinsic motivation (Ferlazzo, 2023; Salva & Matis, 2025).
- Provide collaborative learning opportunities, reflecting collectivist cultural values that prioritize interdependence and group success (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2022; Hammond, 2015; Hofstede et al., 2010).

⁶ Three Reads Protocol is a peer learning strategy that supports students in understanding math word problems. It involves reading word problems multiple times to breakdown meaning (Kelemanik et al., 2016).

- Document both student assets (e.g., skills, strengths, experience) and areas of need to ensure an asset-based approach that avoids a focus only on deficits.

Figure 12, *Safe and Supportive Environment Practices and Recommendations*, provides specific practices and recommendations for fostering safe and supportive environments for SLIFE.

Figure 12. Safe and Supportive Environment Practices and Recommendations

Practice	Recommendation
Prioritize Community Building	• Teachers can use welcoming routines (e.g., name cards, get-to-know-you activities, consistent entry rituals) to reduce anxiety on arrival and build community. They can also integrate opportunities to learn about SLIFE learners' backgrounds, experiences, interests, and goals (e.g., journal writing/drawing, identity portraits, student surveys, student goal setting). These activities will need to be scaffolded and modeled to foster participation. • Administrators can share expectations for school and classroom community building, noting that teachers should be prepared to welcome students into their classroom year-round.
Teach School Cultures and Routines	• Teachers can work with the class to establish classroom norms collectively and ensure that these norms are explained in students' home languages and modeled for SLIFE. They can create visual supports and multilingual anchor charts that outline expectations and common procedures. • ELD teachers can teach SLIFE how and when to seek help, including role-playing scenarios and naming specific people and resources that are available. They can also provide visual cards that SLIFE can use to indicate the assistance they might need (e.g., restroom, repeated directions).
Build Relationships with Students	• All educators can look for opportunities to share about themselves using pictures and videos and take time to learn about SLIFE learners' interests and goals in order to build stronger relationships with these students. • ELD teachers, counselors, and classroom teachers can implement consistent check-ins to provide opportunities for SLIFE to share questions and concerns. The purpose of these should be explained in students' home languages along with examples of the types of questions they might want to ask.
Support Students in Building Relationships with Each Other	• Teachers can use cooperative learning structures with clear roles and norms, so SLIFE have a predictable way to engage with peers. They can implement both intentional heterogeneous and homogeneous groupings to expose SLIFE to diverse classmates.

Practice	Recommendation
	Counselors and ELD teachers can look for ways to integrate SLIFE into sports, clubs, and other enrichment activities in order to support them in feeling part of the larger school community.
Foster a Climate of Social-Emotional Support and Care	- Administrators can include in their professional learning plans, training in culturally responsive teaching, social-emotional learning, and trauma-informed care. - Counselors can share resources with colleagues to assist them in understanding the impact of trauma as well as identifying triggers and signs of trauma (e.g., depression, withdrawal, emotional outbursts).

Sources: Center for Applied Linguistics, 2022; OELA, 2023; Salva & Matis, 2025; Staehr Fenner & Teich, 2024

SLIFE PROGRAMMING RESOURCE LINKS

The following links provide access to resources and tools related to SLIFE programming that can be adapted to fit the needs of your LEA. Please note that the links provided are subject to change. The continued accuracy or availability of external websites or their content cannot be guaranteed.

- [A Matter of Design: English Learner Program Models in K-12 Education \(Sugarman, 2018\)](#)

This brief provides detailed information on ML program models in K-12 schools.

- [California Newcomer Network SLIFE Curriculum](#)

This is a curriculum designed for newcomer students who are below a fourth-grade reading level in their home language. All materials are freely available for public use.

- [How to Support ELL Students with Interrupted Formal Education \(Colorín Colorado\)](#)

This resource provides information on best practices for supporting SLIFE, including information on who SLIFE are, what they need, teaching ideas, and ideas for providing school-wide support to SLIFE.

- [Implementing Evidence-Based Instructional Practices for English Learners \(USDE, 2025\)](#)

This resource outlines five evidence-based instructional practices to support MLs in accessing grade-level content while simultaneously developing English language proficiency.

- [Integrating Language While Teaching Mathematics \(USDE, 2021\)](#)

This resource outlines five evidence-based instructional practices to support language development within the mathematics classroom for MLs.

- [Key Considerations for Multilingual Learner Program Types and Instructional Models \(Smith, 2024\)](#)

This article provides an overview of ML program types and ELD instructional models, as well as considerations for selecting appropriate programs and models for your context.

- [Newcomer Toolkit \(U.S. Department of Education\)](#)

This resource is designed to help U.S. educators and staff who work directly with immigrant students and their families. Chapters 2 – 4 address topics related to SLIFE programming.

- [SLIFE Program Review Planning Tool \(SupportEd\)](#)

This tool provides a process to annually review SLIFE programs for alignment with current research-based practices.

- [SLIFE Scheduling and Planning Document \(SupportEd\)](#)

This planning document provides educators with a tool to explore SLIFE scheduling to maximize resources.

- [Translanguaging \(WIDA, 2020\)](#)

This WIDA focus bulleting includes an overview of what translanguaging is and why it is important, and it highlights translanguaging from the perspective of four educators.

- [Welcoming, Registering, and Supporting Newcomer Students: A Toolkit for Educators of Immigrant and Refugee Students in Secondary Schools \(Institute of Education Sciences & Regional Education Lab Northwest\)](#)

This resource toolkit is intended to help educators and other stakeholders identify and use research-based practices, policies, and procedures for welcoming, registering, and supporting newcomer immigrant and refugee students who are attending secondary schools (grades 6-12) in the United States. Section 4 relates to professional learning to support SLIFE programming.

Family and Community Partnerships

Family and Community Partnerships Section Overview

Engaging families and the community is essential for meeting the academic and social-emotional needs of all MLs, including SLIFE. Strong school-family partnerships improve outcomes such as grades, test scores, language proficiency, social skills, high school graduation, and postsecondary enrollment (Ferguson, 2008; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lindholm-Leary, 2015; NASEM, 2017).

SLIFE families are a diverse group, and many will be unfamiliar with U.S. school norms. They often need guidance on supporting their children within U.S. schools (McNeely et al., 2019; Pentón Herrera, 2022). Some SLIFE families may have strong educational backgrounds, whereas other families may have limited or interrupted education themselves. Thus, it is critical for LEAs and schools to build relationships with and understanding of SLIFE families in order to respond to their individual needs.

Community-based organizations can be a valuable resource in supporting SLIFE family needs beyond an academic context. Recommendation 7 from The Blueprint for Maryland's Future: Workgroup on English Learners in Public Schools (November 2022) specifically calls on MSDE to "collaborate with community partners and LEAs to implement specialized programs and support for SLIFE." (p. 103).

This section provides information to support LEAs and schools with:

- Empowering SLIFE families with the knowledge and tools they need to navigate the U.S. school system, and
- Ideas for partnering with community-based organizations.

EMPOWERING SLIFE FAMILIES

At first, SLIFE families may not know enough about the U.S. educational system and its norms and expectations to effectively engage with their local schools (Motamedi et al., 2021). It is important to empower SLIFE families with the knowledge and tools they need to advocate for themselves and engage effectively with their local schools over time. This includes helping them understand the U.S. education system—particularly their local school—and supporting their involvement at both the school and LEA levels. Collaboration with SLIFE families is key to fostering trust and student success.

Figure 13, *Recommendations for Empowering SLIFE Families*, provides specific recommendations for sharing key information and tools to empower SLIFE families.

Figure 13. Recommendations for Building Relationships with SLIFE Families**Inform families about important school system information and their rights.**

- Develop and seek out resources such as the Maryland State Advisory Council for English Learners' "Guide to School for Families of English Learners" (2022) to support this work.

Build knowledge of SLIFE families.

- Learn correct pronunciation of names; add pronunciation features to SIS.
- Learn about SLIFE families' countries, languages, and education systems.
- Attend community events to connect with SLIFE families, understand local resources, and strengthen partnerships.

Establish two-way communication with SLIFE families.

- Ensure SLIFE families receive and understand school information.
- Ask about SLIFE families' preferred communication method and language; share information in multiple formats.
- Offer texting apps, calls, translated materials, and in-person options.
- Implement LEA policies for interpretation and translation services.

Embed SLIFE-specific supports in school events.

- Assist SLIFE families in navigating school procedures and expectations.
- Invite SLIFE families to meet staff during events and explain the purpose of the events.
- Clearly communicate ways families can support learning (e.g., attendance, homework routines).

Sources: OELA, 2023; Breiseth et al., 2011

COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Partner with local organizations to provide wraparound services for SLIFE and their families, such as tutoring, medical and social services, trauma support, adult language classes, and immigration resources (Breiseth, n.d.). Community-based organizations can also provide support to SLIFE in meeting their education and career goals (e.g., GED preparation, workforce development courses).

Schools and LEAs can collaborate with a range of community organizations to provide these services, such as hospitals, religious organizations, refugee agencies, community colleges, youth organizations, and local government (Keppler et al., 2015; Snyder & Staehr Fenner, 2020). These community partners, with their cultural and linguistic expertise, can effectively connect schools and SLIFE families.

The LEA SLIFE Committee should compile a list of local community partners to support schools in making these connections.

Figure 14, *Process for Partnering with Community Organizations*, outlines steps for developing strong SLIFE community partnerships.

Figure 14. Process for Partnering with Community Organizations

Step	Description
1. Identify the needs and goals of SLIFE families.	Gather feedback from SLIFE families about their needs and wants. Use interviews, focus groups, and parent-teacher conferences to gather this information. Ask questions about possible resources in the community and whether families have explored them.
2. Determine community resources available.	Once you understand the needs and goals of your specific SLIFE community, explore potential resources in your community. Identify community leaders who are advocates for SLIFE and their families.
3. Conduct information interviews.	Conduct informational interviews with the members of community-based organizations to explore the types of resources they provide and how the school and the organization might collaborate in support of SLIFE and their families.
4. Make connections and share information.	Make connections between the community-based organization and SLIFE families. This could be done by bringing in members of community-based organizations to speak at a school event or offering field trips to different agencies.
5. Set specific, collaborative goals.	Work together with community-based organizations to set specific, collaborative goals. Assign responsibility for action steps, set deadlines for meeting goals, and identify how you will know if your goals have been met. As you work towards your goals, consider possible funding sources to help you with the resources that you need to meet your goals.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP RESOURCE LINKS

The following links provide access to resources and tools related to family and community partnerships for SLIFE that can be adapted to fit the needs of your LEA. Please note that the links provided are subject to change. The continued accuracy or availability of external websites or their content cannot be guaranteed.

- [Empowering SLIFE – Enhancing Schooling through Family Engagement Infographic \(SupportEd\)](#)

This infographic shares the importance of engaging SLIFE families and the community and some effective practices to do so.

- [How to Support ELL Students with Interrupted Formal Education \(Colorín Colorado\)](#)

This resource provides information on best practices for supporting SLIFE, including information on who SLIFE are, what they need, teaching ideas, and ideas for providing school-wide support to SLIFE.

- [Newcomer Toolkit \(U.S. Department of Education\)](#)

This resource is designed to help U.S. educators and staff who work directly with immigrant students and their families. Chapter 5 addresses family and community partnerships for SLIFE.

Additional Resources

This section provides links to various supporting resources related to best practices for SLIFE. Please note that the links provided are subject to change. The continued accuracy or availability of external websites or their content cannot be guaranteed.

BOOKS AND ARTICLES

The following list provides links to books and articles related to best practices for SLIFE.

- [*Boosting Achievement: Reaching Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education \(2nd Ed.\)*](#) (2025) (Authors: Carol Salva and Anna Matis)
- [*Breaking New Ground for SLIFE: The Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm \(2nd Ed.\)*](#) (2023) (Authors: Andrea DeCapua and Helaine Marshall)
- [*Learning Unlimited: Strategies for Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education and Other Struggling Multilingual Learners*](#) (2024) (Authors: Nicoleta Filimon and Christi Cartwright-Lacerda)
- [*Meeting the Needs of SLIFE: A Guide for Educators \(2nd ed.\)*](#) (2020) (Authors: Andrea DeCapua, Helaine Marshall, and Frank Tang)
- [*Pathways to Greatness for ELL Newcomers: A Comprehensive Guide for Schools and Teachers.*](#) (2017). (Author: Michelle Yzquierdo)
- [*Persistence of Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education*](#) (2021) (Author: Carol Salva)
- [*6 Translanguaging Activities to Foster Writing for Multilingual Learners of English.*](#) (2024). (Author: Eric Gómez Burgos)
- [*SLIFE: What Every Teacher Needs to Know*](#) (2023) (Author: Andrea DeCapua)
- [*Students with Interrupted Formal Education: Bridging Where They Are and What They Need*](#) (2017) (Authors: Brenda Custodio and Judith O'Loughlin)

OTHER STATES' SLIFE RESOURCES

The following links provide examples of other states' resources related to supporting SLIFE.

- [California Newcomer Network SLIFE Curriculum](#)

This is a curriculum designed for an ELD 1 class of newcomer students who are below a fourth-grade reading level in their home language. All materials are freely available for public use.

- [Massachusetts SLIFE Toolkit](#)

This interactive online toolkit provides Massachusetts schools and educators with tools, ideas, practices, and resources for supporting SLIFE.

- [Minnesota: SLIFE Website](#)

This site provides Minnesota's definition of SLIFE, several learning modules related to supporting SLIFE, and sample SLIFE tools.

- [Mississippi: Supports for English Learner Students with Limited or Inconsistent/Interrupted Formal Education \(SLIFE\)](#)

This guidebook provides information and tools for supporting SLIFE in Mississippi schools.

- [New York: Students with Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education](#)

This site provides information from the New York State Department of Education's resources on SLIFE, including screening tools and webinars.

- [Virginia: Supporting Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Schooling \(SLIFE\) Guidebook](#)

This guidebook provides information for Virginia schools about identifying SLIFE and for providing equitable opportunities and support.

Appendix A: SLIFE Programming Decision-Making Tool

Guiding Question	Notes and Next Steps
Current Program Models	
How effectively does our current ML program model (e.g., newcomer, dual language, sheltered immersion, content-based ELD) meet the unique needs of SLIFE?	
What aspects of our current program already provide supports aligned with SLIFE strengths and needs, and where are there gaps?	
Do our current instructional practices provide SLIFE with scaffolded access to grade-level content?	
How well is language development integrated with academic content in current instruction?	
Are there structures in place to address the foundational literacy and mathematics needs of SLIFE?	
Program Design and Placement	
Based on our SLIFE population size and available resources, is it more feasible to embed SLIFE supports within our existing ML program or to design a dedicated SLIFE program?	
How can we ensure the selected program model provides targeted support while promoting timely integration into general education?	
What measures will we take to ensure SLIFE programming occurs in the least segregated setting possible?	

Guiding Question	Notes and Next Steps
How will we determine when a student has met the goals of the specialized SLIFE program and is ready to transition out?	
Data-Informed Decision-Making	
What data do we currently collect to evaluate SLIFE progress (e.g., language growth, academic achievement, attendance, engagement)?	
How can we use this data to assess whether current program goals are being met?	
What additional data sources (e.g., student focus groups, SLIFE shadowing protocols) can help us better understand SLIFEs' learning experiences and needs?	
How frequently will we review and reflect on program data to inform adjustments?	
Effective Implementation of Instruction	
What professional learning opportunities are needed for educators to understand and address the unique instructional needs of SLIFE?	
How will we provide dedicated time, tools, and structures to support collaboration among educators serving SLIFE?	
How will we communicate program expectations and outcomes clearly to educators, families, and students?	
Reflection and Improvement	
What does success look like for SLIFE within our LEA's or school's context?	

Guiding Question	Notes and Next Steps
How will we measure both short-term and long-term outcomes for SLIFE?	
How will we gather feedback from educators, students, and families to refine our approach over time?	
What steps will we take to sustain and scale effective SLIFE practices across schools and programs?	

Appendix B: Evidence-Based Instructional Practices for English Learners and Considerations for SLIFE⁷

Recommendation	Explanation	Considerations for SLIFE
1. Provide MLs with opportunities to build content knowledge and language competence in tandem.	Educators explicitly highlight disciplinary language while providing scaffolds that enable students to engage in content-rich tasks, ensuring language growth occurs alongside mastery of subject matter.	- Provide linguistic scaffolding beyond what is provided to non-SLIFE to effectively engage SLIFE with grade-level content as they are building content and language knowledge (e.g., labeled images, visual glossaries). - Analyze the language demands of the content to determine key vocabulary and language structures to prioritize for SLIFE during instruction. These may be different than what will be prioritized for other MLs, including more foundational language. Consider academic language demands at the word, sentence, and discourse level. - Differentiate learning tasks and assessments to allow SLIFE to demonstrate their learning in multimodal ways (e.g., demonstrations, sorts, drawing).
2. Leverage MLs' home language, prior knowledge, and cultural assets.	Educators promote the use of home languages, draw on students' prior and cultural knowledge, and foster awareness and appreciation of language variation to enrich learning and build on student strengths.	- Be strategic with and prioritize structured translanguaging⁸ routines (e.g., bilingual journals, cognate lessons, word walls, etc.) to build cross-linguistic transfer. - Integrate strategic use of home language through translanguaging opportunities to support SLIFE in bridging languages and making cross-linguistic connections as well as fostering comprehension. Such strategies might include interactive journaling that incorporates home language use and mini lessons on cognates or language comparisons.

⁷ Source for recommendations and explanations: U.S. Department of Education, Office of the English Language Acquisition. (2025). *Implementing evidence-based instructional practices for English learners*.

⁸ Translanguaging is the use of more than one language for communication. It allows students to make full use of their linguistic resources (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García & Wei, 2014). Translanguaging resources are provided in the additional resource section of this guidebook.

Recommendation	Explanation	Considerations for SLIFE
		Make connections to real-life situations and students' prior experiences to strengthen sense of relevance.
3. Engage MLs in productive interactions with peers.	Educators consistently implement structured peer-learning activities that are scaffolded to support student participation and learning.	- Implement and model consistent peer learning routines and language to support peer discussions. - Strategically group SLIFE to support participation. For example, you might group students by shared home language first to allow for home language discussion and then shift students into heterogenous groups for a hands-on activity in which students have assigned roles. - Foster the development of listening skills as part of the language acquisition process through the use of structured conversations that teach different talk moves (e.g., agreeing, disagreeing, adding on), and integrate listening practice into peer learning activities (e.g., jigsaw or gap activities).
4. Provide direct and explicit instruction focusing on key aspects of literacy.	Educators teach and provide students opportunities to practice strategies to engage with complex texts.	- Teach strategies that will foster greater learner autonomy (e.g., word learning strategies, self-monitoring comprehension). - Embed opportunities for SLIFE to practice foundational literacy skills as needed through small group or station activities. - Support reading comprehension with pre-, during, and post-reading activities that can build background knowledge, text awareness, and academic language. - Engineer select texts to provide greater access and amplify language learning opportunities.⁹
5. Incorporate regular opportunities to	Educators provide students with consistent, structured opportunities to write	Give SLIFE opportunities to discuss their ideas with peers prior to writing.

⁹ Text engineering involves adapting a text by breaking it into meaningful sections and adding text-based supports, such as guiding questions, headers and subheaders, visuals, embedded definitions, and repetition of key terms to guide students through the content and support understanding (Billings & Walqui, 2021).

Recommendation	Explanation	Considerations for SLIFE
develop written language skills.	across all content areas, including math.	• Prioritize the sharing of ideas over correct spelling and grammar and limit the use of translation devices. • Teach SLIFE how writing works through activities such as text deconstruction and co-construction activities. • Support SLIFE in expanding their academic writing through linguistic scaffolds such as sentence and paragraph frames and word banks.

Appendix C: Elementary and Secondary Instructional Practice Examples

Grade Level	Instructional Practices in Action Example
Elementary example A 4 th grade classroom with three SLIFE and five additional MLs	On the first day of the water cycle unit, Ms. Lopez invites her 4th graders to circulate around the room, observing images of clouds, puddles, steam, and rain. Students are familiar with this routine and talk about the pictures using phrases like, I see... and I wonder... The SLIFE learners are strategically paired with a student who shares their home language, and they also have visual glossaries in hand to support them in describing pictures in English if they choose. Using formative assessment data from the gallery walk, Ms. Lopez selects key words like <i>evaporation</i> and <i>condensation</i> to introduce to the whole class using gestures, student-friendly definitions, and simple visuals. Students add these terms to their visual glossaries, sketching quick drawings. The class then collaboratively reads an engineered text on the water cycles that includes guiding questions, visuals, and embedded definitions. In a small group with their ELD teacher, Mr. Evans, later that day, SLIFE learners reread the text and then practiced using sentence stems to describe relevant images. During the small group, Mr. Evans intentionally connects the science concepts to familiar experiences like cooking rice and seeing dew on grass. The next day, students are placed in heterogenous pairs and asked to arrange labeled diagrams of the water cycle with teacher-supplied images, vocabulary, and arrows. The SLIFE learners have access to both their visual glossaries and an anchor chart of practiced language from their ELD small group. The unit wraps up with a writing task. With the help of sentence frames, their visual glossary, and a graphic organizer, each SLIFE learner drafts a short paragraph explaining how water moves through the cycle. By the end of the unit, SLIFE have not only learned key science concepts but have also built language skills through visuals, collaboration, and meaningful connections to their own lives.
Secondary example A secondary social studies class with two SLIFE and three other MLs	In Ms. Haddad's high school world history class, students are tasked with writing an essay comparing how different countries have addressed global warming. To support SLIFE and other learners, the teacher explains the importance of being able to use comparative language across subjects and includes visual supports during the explanation. The teacher then leads a brainstorming activity to identify similarities and differences in efforts countries have made to address global warming based on their prior learning. Students can refer to visuals, charts, and notes during the discussion. Students are grouped homogenously by home languages and have the option to discuss in English or their home language. Following the discussion, the class develops a word wall with visuals and sentence stems for comparing. All students receive a graphic organizer to help them organize their ideas for the writing.

Grade Level	Instructional Practices in Action Example
	As the class begins working on the graphic organizer and their essay, the teacher brings together the SLIFE learners and a couple of other students who need additional support with the task. She reads aloud a short model essay and then has volunteer students reread the text. Together they discuss key features of the essay, how the essay is organized, and the language of comparisons that are in the essay. The SLIFE learners then work on completing the graphic organizer for their essay. As they begin writing, they use the word wall and a paragraph frame to support them in integrating academic vocabulary and producing more complex sentence structures. They also receive targeted assistance from the teacher. In addition, the students also seek out additional help from their ELD teacher during an afterschool homework club. These scaffolds help students build both the language and skills needed to confidently compose a comparative essay (adapted from Staehr Fenner et al., 2024).

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