

RECOMMENDED TOOLS

TOOL 1: EVALUATING A CHARTER APPLICATION

An authorizer’s first and perhaps most significant opportunity to support the creation and implementation of a strong English learner program comes during the evaluation of a charter application. By asking key questions and establishing specific criteria with which to evaluate an operator’s preparedness to enroll and educate English learners, an authorizer not only signals a deep commitment to serving its English learner and limited English proficient communities but also teaches an operator what essential components are included in a strong English program.

It should be noted that many states have implemented—or are beginning to implement—new statutory, regulatory, and/or policy provisions specific to serving EL students. Sometimes those new provisions apply to charter schools; sometimes charter schools are exempted if they can demonstrate—and if their authorizer approves—other proven pedagogical methods to educate EL students. Every authorizer must familiarize itself with the specific state laws, regulations, and policies pertaining to the education of EL students and determine which/how those may apply to charter operators.

Finally, we know not all authorizers are the same size or have the same resources. Some are big with ample resources; others manage small (and sometimes, very small) portfolios and must evaluate, monitor, and support applicants and operators with very modest means. The “essential elements” described below zoom in on all the elements that together build a strong EL program. They are designed to help authorizers of all sizes and resources ask key questions and focus an authorizer’s examination of a charter application’s proposed EL program.

The “critical considerations” follow the essential elements and are designed to help an authorizer zoom out of its detailed inquiry, see the big picture proposed by the applicant, and evaluate if/how the operator’s entire program is well rounded and complete. These critical considerations may serve as a final checklist, assisting an authorizer as it summarizes its final evaluation.

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF A CHARTER APPLICATION

Every charter school application should have the following elements:

- A community-based analysis, including but not limited to a review of recent census data, of the five most commonly spoken languages in the communities which the school intends to serve
- A detailed plan of how English learners (EL) and limited English proficient (LEP) families and communities will be engaged and communicated with, including how
 - EL students and/or LEP families will be informed about the school, actively recruited, and encouraged to enroll
 - School materials, including the website, will be made available in other languages, either in writing or orally, as required by law

- Open houses and other school events will identify and include interpreters
 - Community partners will be engaged and collaborated with to ensure EL students and/or LEP families understand their eligibility to enroll
 - The operator will satisfy any enrollment targets for EL students that may exist under state law
 - The operator will ensure EL students and/or LEP families understand residency can be proven without providing Social Security information
 - The operator will create, maintain, and update a roster of LEP parents/guardians and their respective preferences for the languages in which they would like to communicate with the school
- A detailed plan of how an English learner will be
 - Recruited
 - Identified
 - Assessed for placement into an EL program
 - Placed into an EL program
 - Have her/his parents or guardians notified and provided the opportunity to opt out of the EL program
 - Evaluated annually on her/his attainment of English proficiency
 - Evaluated annually on her/his academic performance, in both proficiency and growth
 - Included in field trips, extracurricular activities, and summer school programs
 - Exited from an EL program
 - Monitored after exiting an EL program
- A detailed plan of how an English learner program will be
 - Created, based on what specific sound pedagogical theory/data
 - Staffed
 - Implemented in such a way that students are not segregated unnecessarily
 - Evaluated regularly and by whom
 - Assessed as effective, based on the collection and review of what data
 - Improved as needed, based on the outcome of the program evaluation
- A clear staffing plan that explains
 - How many teachers and support staff and with what qualifications will be needed to implement the chosen EL program
 - What and how often professional development opportunities will be provided to teachers/staff implementing the chosen EL program
 - How often trainings for all staff (not just those implementing the EL program) will be administered to ensure all staff understand their roles in supporting and educating EL students
 - How EL students with Individualized Education Programs will be served by the EL program
 - Which staff members will be responsible for ensuring satisfaction with all state and federal legal obligations, in addition to those specific to implementing a sound EL program, including but not limited to
 - administering the HLS

- ensuring potential EL students are placed into appropriate EL programs within 30 days (or less, as required by state law)
 - updating the website with translated materials
 - ensuring interpreters are present as needed
 - ensuring student and family records are updated as needed
- A clear plan to collect data, such as
 - The number of students given the Home Language Survey (HLS) each year
 - The number of students identified as potential EL students by the HLS each year
 - The number of students placed into the EL program each year
 - The number of EL students progressing academically each year
 - The number of EL students also identified as needing IEPs or 504 plans each year
 - The number of students who exited the EL program each year
 - Absence rates for EL students each year
 - Discipline rates for EL students each year, including but not limited to in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, expulsions
 - Academic performance, both proficiency and growth, of each EL student each year
 - Attrition rates for EL students each year
 - Graduation rates for EL students each year
 - Length of time each EL student has been in the chosen EL program, compiled/updated annually
- In addition to the information discussed above, an authorizer may choose to ask an applicant to submit any/all of the following supporting documentation:
 - Application form
 - Home Language Survey
 - Notification letter to be sent home to family of eligibility to be placed into an EL program and parents'/guardians' right to decline
 - State assessment to be used to place a student in an EL program and used to exit a student from an EL program
 - Translated "vital" documents
 - Calendar of trainings/professional development to be offered (both to teachers/staff implementing the EL program and to the entire faculty/staff)

THE CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ultimately, an authorizer should look for the following:

- A clear understanding of both the most commonly spoken languages in the communities intended to be served by the school and the resources (website, translation services, interpreters) and documents needed to actively engage with EL students and/or LEP families
- A demonstrated understanding of the legal obligations under state and federal law specific to serving English learners, including state and federal civil rights laws as well as the Every Student Succeeds Act

- A clear, comprehensive plan to recruit, enroll, identify, and educate English learners that provides meaningful and equitable access to the school's curriculum and activities
- A clear, specific plan to evaluate the academic progress of English learners, including processes for data collection/review, exiting English learners from the EL program, and subsequent monitoring of exited English learners
- A clear, specific plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the EL program and processes to revise/improve the EL program as needed
- A demonstrated capacity to implement the chosen EL program using qualified staff
- A clear, specific plan to communicate effectively with limited English proficient parents/families
- A clear, specific plan to identify and engage community partners and find additional supports for EL students and/or LEP families