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# HLS Interpretation Guidance

A Home Language Survey (HLS) is the first step in determining whether a student qualifies as an English learner. Specifically, this form should be used to help determine whether administering an approved screener is appropriate. The instructions below provide guidance on how to interpret a completed HLS. Please note that these instructions are based on [DEED’s HLS template](https://education.alaska.gov/ESEA/TitleIII-A/docs/HomeLanguageSurvey.docx). Your district’s HLS may look slightly different from DEED’s template, but the general principles should still apply. Remember, in order to identify a student as an English learner, they must meet the definition of an English learner and receive a qualifying score on an approved English language proficiency screener. See [DEED’s EL Identification, Assessment, and Data Reporting Guide](https://education.alaska.gov/ESEA/TitleIII-A/docs/EL_Identification.docx) for more information.

## General

Districts should l make every effort to ensure that parents/guardians understand the purpose of the HLS – to identify children who *might* have another language impacting their English language development and who *might* qualify as English learners (EL) eligible for additional English language acquisition assistance form the school/district.

**All** students must complete a home language survey, but the HLS should only be completed **once** in a student’s academic career and should be kept in the student’s cumulative folder/student information system (along with any other documentation used as part of the EL identification process, such as [Language Observation Checklists](https://education.alaska.gov/ESEA/TitleIII-A/docs/Language%20Observation%20Checklist%20(LOC-A).docx), interview notes, etc.). The HLS can be completed as a hard-copy form, or as an electronic form. If there are any students in the district without a HLS on file, the district should take steps to collect completed forms for those students.

## Section A – Student Information

This purpose of this section is, primarily, to gather demographic information and ensure that the information included in this form can be matched with the correct student record. Some questions may influence screening decisions.

**Student Name**: This question is here so the form can be matched with the correct student. It has no bearing on whether the student is an EL.

**Date of Birth:** This question is here so the form can be matched with the correct student. It has no bearing on whether the student is an EL.

**Place of Birth:** If the student was born in another country, they ***might*** an EL. Use the answers from the rest of the form to help determine if screening is appropriate.

**Alaska Student ID #:** This question is here so the form can be matched with the correct student. It has no bearing on whether the student is an EL. **Note**: Families may not know the student’s AKSID, especially if the child is new to AK schools. If this is left blank by the family, enter the AKSID.

**Grade:** This helps determine what grade-level screener, if appropriate, a student would take. **Note:** Only students in KG and older can be identified as an EL, so if the student is in Preschool, and the rest of the form suggests screening is appropriate, you *must* wait until KG to administer an approved screener.

**Participating in a student exchange program:** If “YES,” the student ***might*** be an EL. Use the answers from the rest of the form to help determine if screening is appropriate.

**Has the student received formal education outside of the U.S.:** If “YES,” the student ***might*** be an EL. Use the answers from the rest of the form to help determine if screening is appropriate.

**If YES, circle grades completed outside of the U.S.:** This helps paint a better picture of the student’s education background. If the student spent significant time in school outside of the U.S., especially in a non-English environment, it could be an indication that screening is appropriate. Use the answers from the rest of the form to help determine if screening is appropriate.

**If YES, what was the Language of Instruction:** If the language listed is not English, the student ***might*** be an EL. Use the answers from the rest of the form to help determine if screening is appropriate.

## Section B – Communication Preferences

The purpose of this section is to determine whether a family may need language assistance, regardless of the student’s language needs.

**In what language would you prefer to receive information from the district and school:** If “OTHER” is selected, the student ***might*** be an EL. Use the answers from the rest of the form to help determine if screening is appropriate.

**Note:** This question should not be used as sole justification for screening/not screening a student. It is possible that a parent/guardian is not fluent in English, but that the child is fluent. It is also possible that a family who is not fluent in English would still prefer to receive communications in English. Remember, schools/districts have a legal obligation to provide meaningful communication to families who are not proficient in English, so every effort should be made to provide communications in a family’s preferred language.

## Section C – Language Background

The purpose of this section is to gather information about the student’s/family’s language background and language use. The answers to these questions will be the primary factor in determining whether to administer a screener. The first three questions meet the federal standard for a “minimally compliant” home language survey.

**What was the first language(s) your child learned to speak:** If “ENGLISH,” the student is likely not an EL. If “OTHER,” the student is a ***potential*** EL and screening is likely appropriate, even if the other questions in this section indicate “ENGLISH.”

**What language(s) is used in the student’s home *most of the time*:** If “ENGLISH,” the student is likely not an EL. If “OTHER,” the student is a ***potential*** EL and screening is likely appropriate, even if the other questions in this section indicate “ENGLISH.”

**What language(s) does your child use *most of the time* when speaking:** If “ENGLISH,” the student is likely not an EL. If “OTHER,” the student is a ***potential*** EL and screening is likely appropriate, even if the other questions in this section indicate “ENGLISH.”

**Note:** If the answer to *any* of the three questions above is “OTHER,” the student is a ***potential*** EL, and screening is likely appropriate.

**Do you consider your child to be Alaska Native, Native American, or a native of U.S. outlying areas:** If “YES,” use the following two questions to help determine if screening is appropriate. If “NO,” use the previous questions to help determine if screening is appropriate.

**If YES, is a Native/Tribal language widely spoken in your child’s home/community:** If “YES,” use the next question to help determine if screening is appropriate. If “NO,” use the previous questions to help determine if screening is appropriate.

**If YES, do you believe that a Native/Tribal language has influenced how your child uses English:** If “YES,” the student is a ***potential*** EL and screening is likely appropriate, even if the other questions in this section indicate “ENGLISH.” If “NO,” screening may not be appropriate.

**Note:** If the completed HLS indicates that there is a language other than English that may be influencing the student’s English proficiency, screening is likely appropriate. However, schools/districts are encouraged to conduct some kind of follow-up with the family/student to make a final determination on screening. This could be through a family interview to get a fuller picture of their language use, and/or through administering a [Language Observation Checklist](https://education.alaska.gov/ESEA/TitleIII-A/docs/Language%20Observation%20Checklist%20(LOC-A).docx) to get a better sense of the student’s English language usage. If the follow-up indicates screening is appropriate, administer an approved screener. If the follow-up indicates that screening is not appropriate, then do not administer a screener. Remember to save all documentation related to reasons for screening/not screening in the student’s file/records.

**Remember:** If the HLS indicates only English throughout, but the school/district has reason to believe there is another language used in the home that appears to be impacting the student’s English language proficiency, then a Language Observation Checklist can be administered to determine whether or not screening is appropriate. Schools/districts are encouraged to contact the family if it is believed the HLS is inaccurate as it may be due to a misunderstanding.