



**Connecticut Students with Limited  
and/or Interrupted Formal Education  
(SLIFE):  
A Resource Handbook**

Connecticut Administrators of Programs for English  
Language Learners (CAPELL)

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## **Introduction**

An increasing and diverse number of English learners (ELs) who are Students with Limited and/or Interrupted Formal Education, (SLIFE), have been enrolling in Connecticut schools. These students often do not possess the school readiness skills, sociolinguistic proficiencies, content knowledge, and academic ways of thinking demonstrated by students who have consistently attended schools. Interruptions in formal schooling may be caused by a variety of factors that would impact the student's ability to perform and achieve in a Connecticut classroom with typical peers. According to *WIDA, Focus on SLIFE: Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education*, "Students who have these characteristics could be refugees, migrant students, or any student who experienced limited or interrupted access to school for a variety of reasons, such as poverty, isolated geographic locales, limited transportation options, societal expectations for school attendance, a need to enter the workforce or contribute to the family income, natural disasters, war, or civil strife (1)".

The lack of schooling and associated socio-academic implications often pose more complex and variant challenges than those typically encountered among other ELs. These students should be provided comprehensive instruction which capitalizes on their background knowledge and interests, creating opportunities to make significant progress to achieve educational goals including college and/or career readiness.

The purpose of this document is to provide Connecticut educators and stakeholders with guidance on practice and procedures for meeting the language and academic needs of SLIFE students. The guidance addresses the definition, programmatic guiding principles, identification of SLIFE students, instructional guidelines, and additional considerations in working with SLIFE.

## **Definition of Students With Limited and/or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE)**

SLIFE is an umbrella term used to describe a diverse subset of the English learner population who share several unifying characteristics (WIDA, 2015). Typically, these students enter or re-enter a U.S. school after the second grade with school experience characterized by one or more of the following:

- Academic skills two or more years below expected grade level
- Consistent, but limited formal schooling
- Inconsistent attendance and/or inconsistent access to education

## Programming Guiding Principles

Programming models for SLIFE require an alternative approach to English language instruction that is based on review of students' educational history, linguistic inventory, cultural knowledge, and experience.

*SLIFE guiding principles:*

- Build foundational skills necessary to develop English language acquisition
- Bridge students' background experiences to academic educational experiences and content in the Connecticut Curriculum Frameworks
- Acknowledge and incorporate students' existing skills and knowledge to facilitate connections to learning the necessary skills and academics to be successful 21<sup>st</sup> century learners
- Design equitable, intentional, responsive, and strategic academic programming
- Consider research-based instructional elements necessary for SLIFE academic success, such as thematic units, culturally responsive teaching, and project-based learning
- Guide students' acculturation into the United States educational system
- When possible, develop or enhance students' native language literacy skills
- Provide socio-academic and socio-cultural supports through a school-based team

In *Helping Newcomer Students Succeed in Secondary Schools and Beyond*, 2012, authors Deborah Short and Beverly Boyson state that there is not one set model for programs that address the needs of new arrival students including SLIFE:

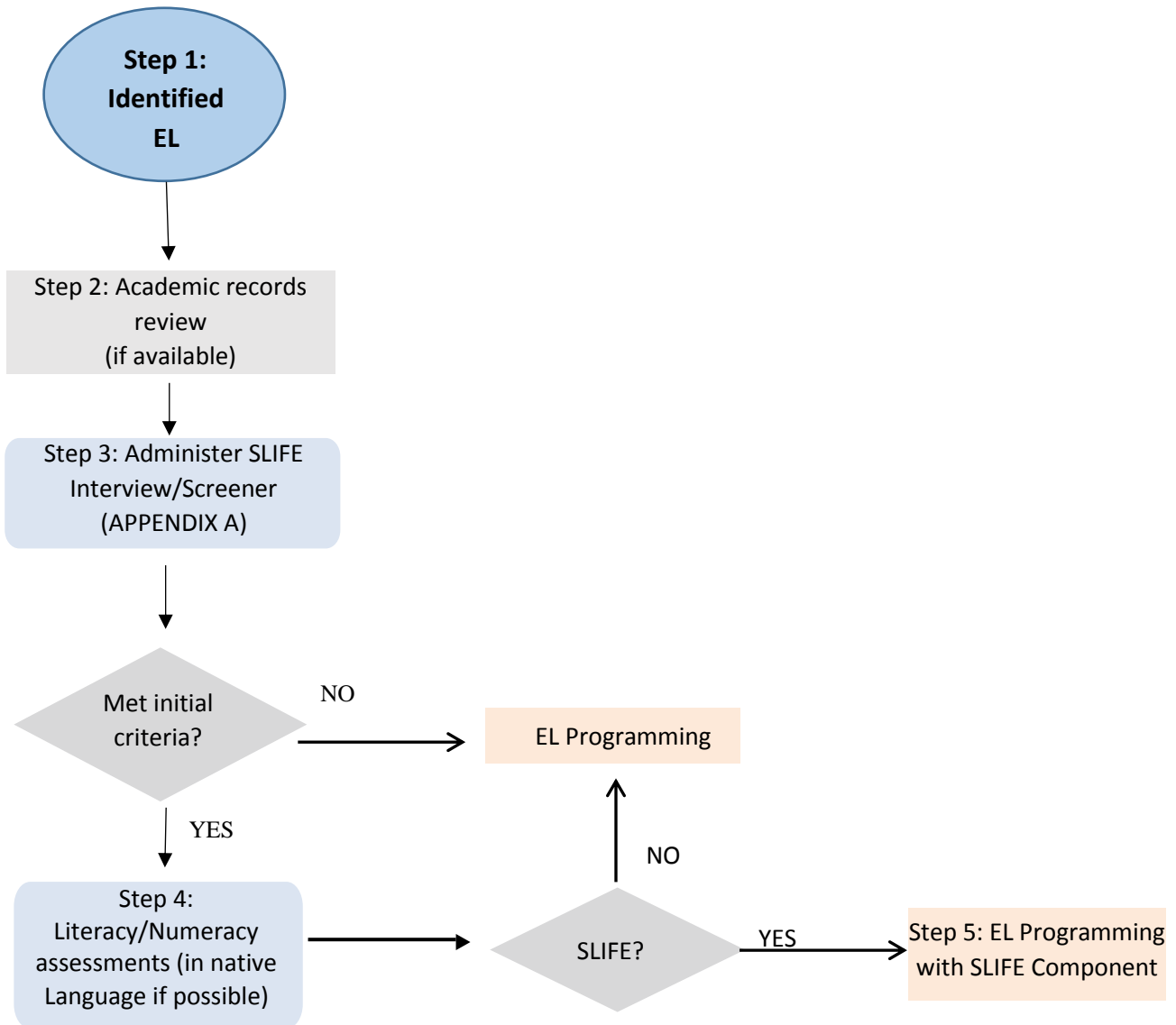
“Middle and high school newcomer students exhibit a variety of characteristics and thus programs must be carefully designed to meet their needs. Besides newcomers' different native languages and countries of origin, the differences in their literacy skills and educational backgrounds prove to be the most important factors for newcomer program's design (p vii).”

Short & Boyson (2012) case studies found that the essential characteristics of effective programs serving SLIFE students are:

- Flexible scheduling of courses and students
- Careful staffing plus targeted professional development
- Basic literacy development materials for adolescents and reading interventions adapted for English learners
- Content area instruction to fill gaps in educational backgrounds
- Extended time for instruction and support (e.g., after school, Saturday, and summer programs)
- Connections with families and social services
- Diagnostics and monitoring of student data
- Transition measures to ease newcomers into the regular school programs or beyond high school

## Identification of SLIFEs

Flowchart for SLIFE Intake and Placement (explained in detail on the following pages):



## **Pathway of SLIFE from Identification to Placement**

### **Step 1: Follow state guidelines for identification of ELs**

See link to guidance document: [http://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/English-Learners/initial\\_EL\\_identification\\_process\\_5-30-17\\_combined.pdf?la=en](http://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/English-Learners/initial_EL_identification_process_5-30-17_combined.pdf?la=en)

### **Step 2: Determine Prior Schooling: Conduct Academic Records Review**

- Conduct a review of academic records, if available.
- Contact the previous school (US or foreign) to get more information about the student's educational background.

### **Step 3: Administer SLIFE Interview/Screening**

- Interview parents or guardians (in their preferred language) to gain more information about the student's educational history (Appendix A).
  - If a parent interview cannot be obtained, then a refugee case worker or community liaison may be able to answer questions about the student.
  - A student interview may be conducted to learn more about prior educational experience.

### **Step 4: Administer Literacy and Numeracy Assessments in native language, if possible**

If information gathered in step 2 and step 3 indicates interrupted or limited educational experience, then administer native language literacy and numeracy assessments to determine if the student is academically functioning two or more years below expected grade level relative to typical peers. School districts may use a selection of literacy and numeracy assessments. If it is not practicable to provide native language assessments and the ELs profile meets the characteristics of SLIFE, as defined above, then the student should be considered a SLIFE until further assessments and data measures indicate otherwise.

### **Step 5: Develop SLIFE Program Placement**

When developing instructional placement for SLIFE, the EL staff, guidance counselors, intervention specialists, content specialists, and administrators should be included in decision-making. To do this, the staff involved in placement should review SLIFE intake data, such as registration documents, Home Language Survey, State English learner placement assessment(s), Sample SLIFE Interview/Screening (see Appendix A), literacy and numeracy assessments, and other pertinent records. The socio-emotional, cultural, academic, and linguistic factors must be considered among other variables, such as trauma<sup>1</sup>, and familial contexts. The designated staff must communicate with parents when making these decisions for SLIFE.

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<sup>1</sup> Trauma may include, but is not limited to, exposure to child labor, human trafficking abuse, gang involvement, displacement, separation, war, and/or natural disaster.

Students designated as SLIFE should be educated in an age-appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive teaching program consistent with their level of English language proficiency and academic needs. Instruction should target gaps in skills and knowledge. Programming should include, but is not limited to:

- ESL/ESOL/ELD
- Native language instruction or supports, if possible
- Intensive literacy instruction
- Intensive numeracy instruction
- Sheltered/bilingual content-area classes
- Guidance and counseling services in a language the student can understand (Title VI; EEOA, 20 USC 1703(f); G.L. c. 76, §5; 603 CMR 26.02)

Effective SLIFE programs support students' transition to academic success. Therefore, course offerings prepare students for typical EL "beginner" courses by focusing "on developing basic English skills, initial academic literacy, and acculturation to U.S. schooling; they may introduce subject area knowledge as well (Short & Boyson, 2012). These courses provide:

- Thematically coordinated literacy and content
- Sheltered curriculum that is intensive, consistent, and age-appropriate
- Instruction by teachers trained to teach literacy and numeracy skills to SLIFE students
- Enrichment opportunities that accelerate both language acquisition and overall socio-emotional adjustment (such as support labs, tutoring centers, new arrival support groups, fieldtrips, etc.)
- Supplemental support programs before or after school, and during the summer to support academic progress and language acquisition



## Instructional Guidelines

SLIFE students require an alternative approach to English language instruction that is based on the review of students' individual needs, and which provides an equitable, intentional, responsive, and strategic academic learning environment. The following considerations should be taken into account:

- Build foundational skills
  - explicit instruction in fundamentals of reading including phonics
  - explicit instruction in basic numeracy and mathematics
- Develop students' awareness of American customs and cultural norms
- Incorporate students' background experiences, skills, and knowledge to help them become successful 21<sup>st</sup> century learners
- Align the curriculum to the Connecticut English Language Proficiency (CELP) Standards to ensure access to content
- Consider research-based instructional elements necessary for academic success, such as:
  - thematic units
  - culturally responsive teaching
  - project-based learning
- Provide needed socio-emotional, academic, and cultural supports
- Include technology resources appropriate to student needs
- Work to activate prior knowledge or build background knowledge around content
- Get to know the students and the experiences and knowledge that they bring into the classroom and leverage that learning as often as possible
- Create a print rich environment with multicultural and age appropriate resources
- Utilize hands on learning
- Keep the content comprehensible, by reducing the level of abstract vocabulary and rate or speech and being mindful of pacing
- Utilize cooperative learning and flexible grouping
- Build all tiers of vocabulary, ensuring that students understand tier 1 in order to understand tier 2 and tier 3
- Provide modified instruction to make the content comprehensible
- Modify or provide alternative assessments to allow students to demonstrate what they know in a linguistically appropriate manner
- Teach students learning strategies or transferable skills

*It is highly recommended to also create collaboration times for staff members to work across departments in order to plan for effective SLIFE instruction.*

## Additional Challenges and Considerations in Working with SLIFE

Meeting the needs of SLIFE students requires a multi- faceted approach. The following is a list of challenges that may arise, and guidance on how to meet those challenges.

Challenges	Considerations
Student arrives with grade-level equivalent transcript but did not have access to a quality education program in the home country.	Conduct assessments to determine student’s current skill level (See page 7: SLIFE Identification process, Step 3& 4).
Student has significant gaps in educational preparation and/or does not have post-secondary education aspirations; student’s goal is to enter the workforce.	Consider developing pathways for career, vocational, and technical education.
Many students and families arrive with significant social, emotional, financial, and health needs.	Create a list of community resources available to students and families.
Many students have to work long hours; often late in to the night.	Be aware of student circumstances that may affect their academic performance.
Lack of an academic and social network to support students outside of the EL classroom.	Identify peers who can support students with content and social demands.
Pressure to have students graduate in 4 years (State Graduation Rate accountability).	As of this printing, the State is considering allowing SLIFE additional time to meet graduation requirements without negative consequences to districts.
Traditional grading and report cards.	Create alternative assessment and grading practices.
Students who enroll in high school who cannot graduate before turning 21.	If students are under 19 years of age, the school is obligated to register them. <sup>2</sup> Provide additional opportunities to earn credits such as summer classes, work study, and credit retrieval, as well as post-21 transition plans.

<sup>2</sup> “Subject to limited exceptions, boards of education must permit any child residing in the district who is between the ages of five and twenty-one (and not yet a high school graduate) to attend public school. [However,]...a board of education may now place a student enrolling at age nineteen or older in ‘an alternative school program or other suitable educational program,’ if that student cannot acquire a sufficient number of credits for graduation by age twenty-one.” From *A Practical Guide to Connecticut School Law, Eighth Edition*, by Thomas B. Mooney, Published by Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, 2014.

Students arrive all year long.	Allow students to earn partial credit. Create year-long courses that begin in first <u>and</u> second semester. Budget for additional staff/classes that may need to be opened the 2 <sup>nd</sup> half of the year. Provide tutoring for students who enter classes after the start of the school year.
Grade placement.	<p>Check school year calendar in student’s home country. Check grade equivalency as compared to the US system.</p> <p><u>For students through grade 8:</u></p> <p>Consider creating a new arrival center as a transitional placement. Do not place students more than one-year below their age equivalent peers.</p> <p><u>For high school students:</u></p> <p>Base grade placement on previously earned credits.</p>
Determining if learning difficulties are the result of the lack of educational opportunities, low-level English proficiency and/or a learning disability.	<p>As stated in the <i>Dear Colleague</i> letter dated 1/7/15 from the U.S. Justice Department, it’s impermissible to delay an evaluation if there is a suspicion of a disability <a href="https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf">https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf</a></p> <p>If it is determined that a student has special needs, ensure that both special education and EL services are provided.</p>
Societal Differences; SLIFE students are not always aware of US laws (age of consent, legal drinking age, truancy, relationship with law enforcement, etc.).	Provide students with information related to these issues. Train teachers to be aware of cultural differences. Have law enforcement officials explain their role to students to increase comfort and trust with authority.
Some students come to live with a relative they do not know.	Provide access to social support services.
Lack of awareness of student’s SLIFE status.	Ensure that the student information system used by the district includes a “flag” for SLIFE, and that teachers are informed of student’s SLIFE status.

Immigration concerns	Do not ask a student’s “status.” <sup>3</sup> Educate students as to their rights. Connect students to local immigrant support groups
Need for volunteers to support SLIFE students	Consider student volunteers from the National Honor Society or World Language classes, local churches, pre-service teachers who need contact hours to fulfill course requirements, Literacy Volunteers, etc.

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<sup>3</sup> Public school districts have an obligation to enroll students regardless of immigration status and without discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin. The decision relied on the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which bans discrimination based on “the ground of race, color, or national origin,” in “any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” Additionally, the United States Supreme Court held in the case of Plyler v. Doe, 457 U.S. 202 (1982), that a State may not deny access to a basic public education to any child residing in the State, whether present in the United States legally or otherwise.

**Appendix A: Sample SLIFE Interview/Screenener**

<p>School: _____          Student Name: _____          Date of Birth: _____          Gender: _____          Date of interview: _____          Location of interview: _____          Interviewer's Name: _____ Title: _____          Who is being interviewed? <input type="checkbox"/> Student <input type="checkbox"/> Parent <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____          In what language is this interview being conducted in? _____          Interpreter's Name: _____</p>	<p>Notes:</p>
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**Summary of Educational Experience**

What was the length of the school day? \_\_\_\_\_ Hours, from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

In what month did the school year begin and/or end? \_\_\_\_\_

When were school vacations? \_\_\_\_\_

Did student attend school daily/consistently? \_\_\_\_\_

Any interruption in his/ her education? \_\_\_\_\_

Ever any extended (month+) absences? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

Has student repeated a grade? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, which grade? \_\_\_\_\_

Does student read and write on grade level in native language? \_\_\_\_\_

Has student ever received evaluation for learning difficulties? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, please describe \_\_\_\_\_

Does student express him/ herself in most fluent language like a child of his/ her age? \_\_\_\_\_

If no, please explain \_\_\_\_\_ Previous study of English? \_\_\_\_\_ How long? \_\_\_\_\_ Where? \_\_\_\_\_

Country \_\_\_\_\_ Was student in a rural or urban setting? \_\_\_\_\_

What was the length of a school day? \_\_\_\_\_ hours, from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

*Turn over form to complete educational experience on reverse side*

## Historical Education Information

GRADE	AGE	SCHOOL YEAR	Inconsistent Attendance?	SCHOOL LOCATION	LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION	WAS STUDENT IN AN ESL OR BILINGUAL PROGRAM?	
						ESL? BIL?	HOW LONG?

	√	SLIFE Identification Criterion	Notes
1.		Entered or re-entered a U.S. school after the second grade	
2.		Academic skills are two or more years below expected grade level	
For 3a and 3b, the student needs to meet a minimum of one of the following criteria:			
3a.		Consistent, but limited formal schooling	
3b.		Inconsistent attendance and/or interrupted access to education	

## Appendix B : Glossary of Key Terms

<b>Culturally responsive teaching</b>	Culturally responsive teaching includes approaches, strategies and methodologies within classroom instruction and curriculum that promote cultural and linguistic competence, consistent with students’ backgrounds in a supportive learning community.
<b>English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction.</b>	ESL instruction provides explicit, direct, and systematic instruction to learn the English language that is intended to promote second language acquisition and English language proficiency. It includes learning outcomes in the four language domains: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. ESL instruction must be tailored to the students’ English language proficiency levels.
<b>English Learner (EL)</b>	Children and adults who are learning English as a second or additional language. This term may apply to learners across various levels of proficiency in English.
<b>Home language survey (HLS)</b>	A set of questions that are part of the school registration process, used to determine if a student should be assessed for English learner identification.
<b>LAS (Language Assessment System) Links</b>	In the state of Connecticut, the assessment used to determine English language proficiency and growth in acquiring English language skills in the domains of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Students are assessed annually and receive a holistic score of 1-5, where 1 is a newcomer and 5 is advanced proficiency. This assessment is used to determine whether or not the student has met the English mastery standard.
<b>Newcomer</b>	An English learner who is new to the language.
<b>SLIFE</b>	Students with Limited and/or Interrupted Formal Education
<b>Sheltered Instruction</b>	Sheltered content instruction (also called Sheltered English Immersion or SEI) includes approaches, strategies and methodology to make the content of lessons more comprehensible and to promote the development of academic language needed to successfully master content standards.
<b>SLIFE Program</b>	A SLIFE program can be a separate, self-contained program or be embedded in another program (bilingual education, dual language, sheltered instruction, etc.). In either case, it is characterized by specially-designed instructional practices that both make content comprehensible for SLIFE and target the skills SLIFE need to be successful in the school’s regular academic program. Socio-emotional needs typical of this population are considered and supported through various programs and services.

<b>World-class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA)</b>	A multi-state consortium which aims to advance academic language development and academic achievement of linguistically diverse students through high quality standards, assessments, research, and professional development for educators.
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- A list of resources to use in working with SLIFE can be found on the CAPELL website (capellct.org) under “Resources.”*