

Why ESL Services for EL Students?

It is becoming increasingly apparent that our nation is growing more diverse each year. Research indicates that it takes English Learners (EL) students between five to seven or even ten years (depending upon at what age they start to study English) to catch up to the academic English language proficiency level of a native speaker. Learning English for effective social communication (known as BICS—Basic Interpersonal Language Skills) takes two to three years. However, acquiring academic English language skills as effective tools for cognitive learning and participation in content-area classrooms (known as CALPS—Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) takes five to seven years. Middle school and high school students are particularly challenged because they need to learn the new language and, in addition, learn the appropriate grade-level academic content area material.

Students who enroll in Birmingham Public Schools at any grade level with limited or no English language skills find the support they need to succeed. Currently, students speaking over 40 different languages are serviced in our English as a Second Language (ESL) program.

Elementary ESL Program

At the elementary level, we have two magnet centers. Students at the basic or at the low-intermediate level can attend West Maple ESL Magnet Center or Pierce ESL Magnet Center depending on where they live. At the centers, students receive daily intensive English instruction, five days per week, and then they spend the rest of the day in mainstream classrooms. Students may choose to return to their neighborhood school when exited from ESL Magnet Center program. Students with high-intermediate English proficiency or above may receive coordinated support services based on recommendations from progress monitoring.

Middle School ESL Program

At the middle school level, the magnet center is located at Berkshire Middle School. The ESL magnet program offers three levels of instruction plus a tutorial class. Students are enrolled in classes according to their proficiency levels. Students with high-intermediate English proficiency or above may receive coordinated support services based on recommendations from progress monitoring.

High School ESL Program

At Groves High School and Seaholm High School, three levels of ESL classes are available for students. These ESL classes are conducted at Seaholm High School and students receive instruction in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Students are enrolled according to their English proficiency levels and receive English credit.