

S.L.I.F.E. GUIDEBOOK

Students with Limited and/or Interrupted Formal Education

Updated June 2025



Table of Contents

Section I

- Purpose- page 2
- Audience – page 2
- Introduction – page 2

Section II

- SLIFE definition –page 3
 - Background – page 3
 - Definition – pages 3-5

Section III

Considerations for Determining, Reporting, and Removing SLIFE Status – page 5

- Process to Determine SLIFE Status – pages 5-6
 - Steps for Evaluating a Transcript – pages 6-7
 - Students Without Transcripts – page 7
- Entry of SLIFE Status in the Student Information System (SIS) - page 8
- Reporting SLIFE Status – page 8
- Removal of SLIFE Status – pages 8-9

Section IV

Program Considerations for SLIFE – page 10

- Guiding Principles and Practices – page 10
 - Considerations for Collaboration – page 10
 - Considerations for Scheduling – pages 11-12
 - Considerations for Instruction – pages 11-12
 - Considerations for Grading – page 13
 - Non-Academic Considerations – page 13

Professional Development – page 14

Resources Consulted – page 15

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide Virginia educators and stakeholders with a definition of Students with Limited and/or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) as well as support related to practices and procedures for meeting their unique interpersonal, linguistic, and academic needs. This support document addresses the SLIFE definition, programmatic guiding principles, identification of SLIFE, instructional recommendations, and additional considerations for working with SLIFE.

The intent of identifying SLIFE status is to alert school division staff to the need for additional services for students and families, training of teachers and school division leaders, and considerations for making programmatic modifications. It is important to note that this status is not meant to limit student access to rigorous, age-appropriate instruction and materials within grade-level core content courses. Refer to [Chapter 4 of the English Learner Toolkit: Tools and Resources for Providing English Learners Equal Access to Curricular and Extracurricular Programs](#) for additional information.

Audience

This document is intended for division leaders, school leaders, English Learner supervisors, Title III Coordinators, Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP), and others who make programmatic and instructional decisions.

Introduction

An increasing number of English learners (ELs), who are also SLIFE, have been enrolling in Virginia schools. These students often have not had full access to formal educational programs for a variety of reasons, including interruptions in or limited access to formal education in their home country, or deficits in language development and literacy due to missing instruction during their attendance in United States (U.S.) schools. As a result, these learners may not have the same sociolinguistic proficiencies, content knowledge, and academic proficiencies or metacognition demonstrated by students who have consistently attended formal educational programs in the U.S., which may have an impact on these students' ability to achieve in Virginia's classrooms.

According to [WIDA's Focus Bulletin on SLIFE](#):

Students who have these characteristics could include 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 and cultural expectations for school attendance, a need to enter the workforce or contribute to the family income, natural disasters, war, or civil strife (page 1).

The lack of formal schooling and the associated socio-academic implications often pose more complex and varied challenges than those typically encountered with other ELs. SLIFE are often at greater risk for dropping out of school than their non-SLIFE peers. In some Virginia school divisions, SLIFE are placed in existing Language Instruction Educational Programs (LIEP), such as Newcomer and Dual Language options, and receive additional instructional support to close educational gaps. Other divisions specifically tailor LIEP models for SLIFE, such as programs that include high-intensity English language development, as well as foundational literacy and numeracy skills development.

SLIFE Definition

Background

Based on [SB 933/Chapter 696 from the 2020 General Assembly](#) session, the VDOE was to adopt a common definition for Students with limited/and or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) and to collect data from school divisions. The Board of Education was also directed to evaluate its programs and supports for students and for consideration of revisions to the Standards of Accreditation.

Based on [SB433/Chapter 623 from the 2024](#) session, the Board of Education was directed to adopt new graduation and dropout formulas. The Board took action at its February 27, 2025, meeting to comport with the law ([Virginia Board of Education Agenda Item, 2025](#)):

The On-time Graduation Report (OGR) is calculated from the same formula that was used the 2023-2024 school year, *except* SLIFE students that have not attended at least two semesters of high school in Virginia will be excluded. This means that the denominator that is used for OGR will be reduced by one for any SLIFE student for at least 2 full semesters of high school in Virginia. Similarly, the dropout rate will exclude the same SLIFE students not attending at least two semesters in a Virginia High School. Reference the [VDOE's Cohort, Graduation, and Drop Out webpage](#) for additional information.

Definition

In response to this legislation, the following definition has been developed:

A Student with Limited and/or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) is an English learner who:

- enters or re-enters any school in the United States at or after the age of eight; AND
- is identified at English Language Proficiency (ELP) Level One or Two; AND
- has at least two years less schooling than similar-age peers.

The SLIFE definition requires school divisions to collect data based on the above three specific indicators.

Collecting Data

For indicator 1: Student enters or re-enters any school in the United States at or after the age of eight, school divisions must use information gained through the registration process to confirm that the student entered school in the United States at or after age eight. This information should be obtained as part of the initial registration process, and all documentation should be maintained at the school division level.

If a student does not register with appropriate documentation to verify the date of birth, school divisions may use their best judgment to determine that the student is at least eight years of age. (Modified from [UNHCR observations on the use of age assessments in the identification of separated or unaccompanied children seeking asylum](#), Section II, Number nine, Item ii).

For indicator 2: Student is identified at English Language Proficiency (ELP) level one or two, school divisions administer a standardized ELP screening tool upon initial student entry into a Virginia school or a standardized annual ELP assessment to identify a potential EL's English Language Proficiency (ELP) level. Both assessments provide a composite proficiency level that can be used to determine an EL's eligibility for SLIFE status.

For indicator 3: Student has at least two years less schooling than similar-age peers: school divisions should collect and maintain records of the previous schooling of students. The VDOE does not collect or maintain these records.

Existing Records

If prior school records, including transcripts, exist for a potential SLIFE, the current school division should review those to determine whether there is evidence that the student has *cumulatively* had at least two years less schooling than similar-age peers.

If the transcripts are not from within the U.S., it may be possible for the current school division to contact the student's prior school(s) to get more information about his or her educational background.

No Existing Records

If records do not exist, information may be gathered in several ways. For example:

- Conduct an oral interview with the student’s parents or guardians in their preferred language, using a proficient interpreter who is not a family member of the student. If necessary, a student interview can be conducted to learn more specifically about his or her prior educational experiences, with family support as available.
- If the student is a refugee, a refugee caseworker or liaison may be able to provide information about the student.
- Assess grade-level content understanding and skills using valid and reliable division or classroom-based assessments to determine whether ELs have similar content knowledge and skills as their same-age peers. If available, it would be beneficial for school divisions to use assessments in the student’s primary language to determine the level of primary language literacy. If the student is literate and proficient in the primary language, the school division can use this information to accurately assess an EL’s abilities without English language interference. Assessments not in the primary language of the EL should include accommodations as it is important to measure content knowledge without unintentionally measuring English skills.

School divisions retain complete autonomy to determine the amount and extent of the prior schooling of potential SLIFE. It is recommended that school divisions establish a protocol for reviewing each newly registered EL’s prior school records or transcripts to determine whether there is evidence demonstrating that the student has two years less schooling than his or her similar-age peers.

Considerations for Determining, Reporting, and Removing SLIFE Status

This section of the document outlines considerations for developing a process to determine SLIFE status, reporting the information into the school division’s Student Information System (SIS), and removing the SLIFE status. It is recommended that SLIFE status is determined as part of the English Learner (EL) identification process.

ELs must be identified as soon as possible, preferably before the start of the school year, but no later than 30 days after the start of the year. A student who enrolls after the start of the school year should be identified within 14 days of enrollment. School divisions should annually review eligibility for SLIFE status. For additional information on the entrance and exit procedures for ELs please refer to the [Addendum to September 23, 2016 Non-Regulatory Guidance: English Learners and Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act \(ESEA\), as Amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#).

Process to Determine SLIFE Status

School divisions should develop a written protocol for determining SLIFE status. This can be added to the school division's written EL identification procedures. It is recommended that the written protocol follow one of the two following options to systematically collect information on the SLIFE indicators throughout the division:

Option One: SLIFE status questions are included in the registration documents provided to all students.

Option Two: A virtual or in-person interview process is conducted for all ELs, age eight years and above, who score level one or two on the ELP Screener.

Both options should include a review of all school records provided and both should include communication with parents or guardians in a language they can understand. How student transcripts are evaluated, has a major bearing on students and should be done with careful consideration, consultation, and with as much information as possible. A balance must be reached between fairness to the student and maintaining the credibility of Virginia's graduation requirements. Please note that the receiving school is not required to award a letter or numeric grade when accepting transfer courses.

Steps for Evaluating a Transcript

Step 1: Interview the student and family to gain insights into the student's educational background and postsecondary goals. This important step will enable school counselors to ask questions regarding a student's educational background. The school counselor (or designated intake staff) should try to obtain all needed documents for translation purposes. You can find sample interview questions in the following resources:

- [Student Intake Form-MAFSA](#)
- [Stafford County Public Schools Example](#)
- [Albemarle County Public Schools Example](#)

Step 2: Research the country's educational system to better understand each course and to consider alignment of content.

- [World Education Services](#) has a database of Education Profile sheets from countries around the world.
- [The NAFSA Guides to Educational Systems Around the World](#) provides information to help in the interpretation of foreign grades. The country guides were originally published in *A Guide to Educational Systems Around the World* (1999) and have continued to be updated since 2008. Each of the updated country guides provides lists of credentials and other data that can be used to help determine placement recommendations and the possibility of transfer credit both for undergraduate and graduate admissions.

- [MAFSA Translations of Course Titles](#)

Step 3: Review and convert the student’s transcript to the current school’s equivalent grading system to determine credits earned for past courses. It may be beneficial to consult with division/school content experts to compare transfer course content to Virginia course content for the awarding of credits. The following resources are available to assist with transcript review:

- [The MAFSA Comparison Charts of Primary and Secondary Foreign School Systems and National Grading Scales](#) - The Charts are the result of a cooperative effort by international student services representatives from the metropolitan District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia area public school systems. The Charts provide general guidelines for the evaluation of foreign transcripts (grading scales) and for the placement of students into the appropriate grade level in the United States. The Charts are copyrighted and available only to MAFSA members as they work to correctly place students into primary and secondary school and to evaluate transcripts from secondary schools outside the United States.
- [Finding The Right Starting Point: Obtaining, Interpreting, and Evaluating International Transcripts](#)
- [Transcript Evaluation PowerPoint](#)
- [Evaluating Foreign Transcripts: The A-Z Manual](#)

Students without Transcripts

In rare situations where transcripts are not available and communication with the previous school is not possible, school counselors and LIEP teachers should work with the student and parents/guardians to recreate the academic history. Divisions should gather key information such as course names, hours of instructional time, length of courses, and grades. Follow the steps outlined in the previous section, Steps for Evaluating a Transcript. Consider the following practices, as well as your division policy, for how to proceed with awarding credits:

- Interview the student and family to gain insights into the student’s educational background and postsecondary goals. This important step will enable counselors to ask questions regarding the student’s educational background. Counselors should try to obtain all needed documents for translation purposes.
- Consult with the student and family to identify postsecondary goals.
- Administer brief, local assessments to determine instructional levels (if the student is unable to read English, then these assessments should be translated).
- Allow students to audit a course prior to placing them to see if it is a good fit. Auditing a course exposes students to the content and language without the apprehension of not being successful. Feedback from both the teacher and student

after the audit is complete can be useful in making an informed instructional decision.

- Examine local policy and guidelines for awarding credits to ensure that all newcomers receive fair and consistent treatment throughout the division.

Entry of SLIFE Status in the Student Information System (SIS)

School divisions should develop a written protocol and process for entering the state/local codes into the division's Student Information System (SIS). Data should be manually entered and reviewed on an annual basis.

Staff responsible for flagging SLIFE status in the school division SIS should be able to access:

- Students' current English Language Proficiency level within the school division's SIS.
- Students' date of entry into U.S. schools within the school division's SIS.
- Verification that the student has had at least two years less schooling than similar-age peers. Once determined, this data can be included in the school division SIS.

The VDOE will collect SLIFE status data for the purpose of Student Record Collection (SRC) through a single data box, SLIFE [X] – designates SLIFE status.

The Student Record Collection (SRC) is submitted by Local Education Agencies three times a year utilizing VDOE's Single Sign-on Web Service (SSWS) and contains all student level enrollment, demographic, and funding data. Students identified as SLIFE are reported with a 'Y' in the SLIFE column indicating Yes, this student is identified as SLIFE. The data submitted is then verified by local approvers and the division Superintendent.

Reporting SLIFE Status

The removal of SLIFE students in the graduation and dropout rates will be through the On-time Graduation Rate reports. This is a state report and is outside of the School Performance and Support Framework, Virginia's combined state and federal accountability systems. SLIFE students will neither impact the federal graduation indicator (FGI), nor any other indicator in the School Performance and Support Framework.

Removing SLIFE Status

School divisions should establish a written protocol, to include an **annual review**, to remove the SLIFE status, as appropriate. The Student Record Collection (SRC) is submitted by LEA's three times a year utilizing VDOE's Sing Sign-on Web Service (SSWS) and contains all student level enrollment, demographic, and funding data. Students no longer identified

as SLIFE are reported with 'N' in the SLIFE column indicating the student is not identified as SLIFE. The data submitted is then verified by local approvers and the division Superintendent.

In preparation for removing SLIFE status, divisions should take into consideration the steps below. Steps can be modified and included in the school division's written protocol for this process.

Step 1:

Identify staff member(s) responsible for the removal of SLIFE status in the SIS, which will require an annual review of data for ELs that reach ELP levels three and four.

Step 2:

Create a school based SLIFE committee to review records for students who remain in or transition out of SLIFE status if they have not reached ELP level three or four. The committee may consider any needed LIEP placement changes, as appropriate. The committee may consist of EL and content teachers, administrators, counselors, and other stakeholders as deemed appropriate.

Step 3:

Develop a written protocol to annually review records for removing SLIFE status.

Option 1: Verify that the student has tested at an English Proficiency Level (ELP) three or four on the annual ELP assessment used in Virginia

Option 2: If the EL has not reached at least ELP level three, convene the SLIFE Committee to determine if the student should retain SLIFE status or have SLIFE status removed based on a review of the following factors:

- Observations and recommendations from student's classroom teachers
- Performance scores and growth on locally administered benchmark assessments, including those that assess reading
- Special education status (if applicable)
- Attendance
- Interpersonal skills observations
- Academic habits and behaviors as documented by educators and specialists working with the students

Step 4:

Document annual SLIFE Committee meetings.

Program Considerations for SLIFE

Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP) models for Students with Limited or Interrupted Education (SLIFE) entail a specialized approach to English language instruction that is based on students' individual needs, and which provides an intentional, and

responsive learning environment. The tips below are the result of a synthesis of case study research and best programmatic practices for SLIFE.

SLIFE have rich backgrounds and many skills that can be used to support their English language development and learning connected to grade-level Standards of Learning (SOL). Many SLIFE come to the United States (U.S.) ready to get a quality education, become successful members of a community, and find new opportunities. Yet, they may be discouraged and frightened by the extent and complexity of the transition to the new school system's expectations. Programs and policies that honor and reinforce their assets and skills will provide them the greatest opportunity to achieve their goals.

Guiding Principles and Practices

Considerations for collaboration, scheduling, instruction, assessment, and discipline should be made when implementing programming for SLIFE. English Learner SLIFE may face unique challenges related to school in the United States. Students may have experienced trauma in their home countries, there may be unfamiliarity with school and specifically the U.S. school system, and there may be language barriers that affect communication as well as differences in cultural expectations and norms. All these factors may impact a students' academic success.

Considerations for Collaboration

Collaboration among EL teachers, general education content teachers, instructional specialists and coaches (including reading specialists), special educators (if applicable), families, school administrators, students, school counselors, office staff, and central office leadership is an essential component to ensuring success for SLIFE.

- Implement a collaborative instructional model with a focus on language and literacy development connected to grade-level content.
- Ensure structures are in place for collaborative planning, instructional delivery, and collaborative assessment and reflection.
- Include office staff and parent liaisons as partners in helping families feel welcome, using communication tools and interpretation as needed.
- Meet with SLIFE and family to discuss goals, graduation and program options, and provide academic advising according to their goals.

Considerations for Scheduling

Scheduling SLIFE into courses to meet their needs is another consideration. It may be necessary to offer flexible scheduling of courses during non-traditional hours to accommodate older SLIFE with jobs and home responsibilities. It may also be necessary to offer flexible scheduling of students to allow for fluid promotion into more challenging courses at times other than the end of the course. Referring to the [Academic and Career Plan of Study](#) is one way to align course options with students' academic and career goals.

There are different Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP) models that offer support for SLIFE.

When making the decision about which LIEP model will best meet the needs of SLIFE, school and division staff may need to consider teacher capacity and staffing. Simply placing SLIFE into a fully mainstream setting without appropriate support and teacher training will not meet their academic, linguistic, or interpersonal needs. Reference the [Standards of Accreditation](#) and the [Credits for Graduation](#) webpages of the Virginia Department of Education website for additional information.

Additional considerations include –

- Offer a program with direct language services for all SLIFE interested in a high school diploma (until the age of 22). See Virginia State Codes [§ 22.1-5., Section D](#) and [§ 22.1-253.13:1., Section D.12.](#)
- For secondary SLIFE, explore options to support content acceleration and earning credits (e.g., credit recovery programs and software, some of which leverage a SLIFE’s primary language; afterschool, evening, or summer programs; bilingual school tutors). Reference the following pages on the VDOE website:
 - [Credits for Graduation](#)
 - [Substitute Tests for Verified Credit](#)
 - [CTE Catalogue of Industry Credentials with Testing Accommodations for English Learners](#)
- Offer additional graduation pathways to pursue career, post-secondary, vocational, and technical education programs for older secondary SLIFE. These can be explored with SLIFE and their families upon enrollment and revisited as needed.
- Integrate students in mainstream classes and courses, to the extent possible, providing sheltered instruction of core academic content. While a SLIFE may be learning basic skills such as the alphabet or how to hold a pencil, they can also begin developing academic content concepts and language when core academic content is made accessible using research-informed and evidence-based instructional practices.
- Sheltered instruction courses are co-taught or taught by a dually certified teacher (content and ESL). Specialized SLIFE-designated core content classes offer an accelerated, accessible model of instruction for grade-level academic and language development aligned to the *Standards of Learning* and English Language Development (ELD) Standards.
- Another option for consideration for SLIFE is the ESL or ELD LIEP model. ESL or ELD courses are taught by a certified EL teacher and are designed with the goal of

developing full English proficiency to support grade-appropriate academic success.

- Foster partnerships with local businesses, adult basic education, higher education programs, or vocational education programs to provide a seamless transition for SLIFE ELs who will need more than four years to graduate or are older and will “age-out” before completing high school graduation requirements.

Considerations for Instruction

There are many instructional strategies and supports available for English Learners. However, some foundational practices can make a difference in the academic success for this group of ELs.

- Create a low anxiety classroom.
 - Team building activities, student surveys, and simple conversations that build relationships are ways to lower the affective filter of SLIFE.
- Make input comprehensible.
 - Provide oral and written input paired with opportunities for students to express themselves.
- Integrate language and content instruction (that, when possible, enhances students’ primary language literacy skills).
- Coordinate language development and academic course content to capture skills and knowledge provided in earlier grades. Review SOL progression tables and checklists, to identify which previously taught skills might need to be incorporated into grade level content and determine how and when it would be best included.
- Adapt standards-based lesson samples that cover the essential information in a linguistically accessible, culturally relevant, and age-appropriate manner.
- Provide age-appropriate evidence-based literacy instruction as defined in section § 22.1-1 of the [Code of Virginia](#).
- Use of academic language and structured discourse by all teachers to strategically teach content.
- Scaffold academic conversations.
 - One way to do this is by using the Question, Signal, Stem, Share, Assess ([QSSSA](#)) method (Seidlitz & Perryman, 2011).

- Allow for modified and locally created alternatives for class assessments to allow students to demonstrate what they know in a linguistically appropriate manner (e.g., reduced number of questions, performance assessments instead of multiple choice, simplified instructions, integrated supports that minimize the language barrier).
- Provide enrichment opportunities that accelerate both language acquisition and overall interpersonal skills (e.g., student or adult mentors with similar backgrounds and experiences, support groups, tutoring, field trips).
- Consider extended time for instruction and support, (e.g. supplemental support programs before or after school, and during the summer to accelerate academic progress and language acquisition).

Considerations for Grading

Grading is a local education agency decision. When informing those decisions, consider grading options that do not penalize SLIFE for their current level of language proficiency.

Non-Academic Considerations

In addition to the various academic considerations for SLIFE it is important to recognize that there may other factors that influence a student's success. Developing partnerships between families and school can support SLIFE as they transition to being a student in the U.S. school system. Consider ways to:

- Connect families to any community resources and social services available, e.g. health care organizations, after-school tutoring, job programs, and ethnically/linguistically based community groups.
- Utilize family liaisons and welcome center personnel when available to support making these connections.
- Guide families into the United States educational system in ways that honor their experiences.
- Educate families and students on U.S. laws that might be new (e.g., school attendance expectations, driving, safety, etc.).

Professional Development

Preparing educators for working with SLIFE requires intentional planning and support. It is important to become familiar with the unique needs of SLIFE and offer professional learning opportunities that build the capacity of the teachers and staff that work with this group of ELs. Consider ways to:

- Provide targeted and on-going opportunities for teachers to build intensive, consistent, and age-appropriate sheltered instruction that integrates foundational literacy and numeracy skills instruction.
- Provide opportunities to engage in research-informed evidence-based professional learning on the acculturation process to better understand the emotional strain these students may experience as they adjust to a new country, language, and customs. For example, students may be facing complex identity issues, culture shock, separation from family, and a sense of loss or trauma after having left their home behind, particularly if they didn't want to relocate to a new country.
- Provide professional learning on research-informed, evidence-based methods for monitoring skills progression, including language development.

Resources Consulted

- [A Guide for Engaging ELL Families: Twenty Strategies for School Leaders](#)
- Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL). (2022). *Understanding and Supporting Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) in Massachusetts: A Literature Review*.
- [Connecticut Students with Limited and/or Interrupted Formal Education \(SLIFE\): A Resource Handbook](#)
- [Beyond Teaching English: Supporting High School Completion by Immigrant and Refugee Students](#)
- DeCapua, Andrea, & Marshall, Helene. (2023). *Breaking New Ground for SLIFE The Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm 2nd Edition*.
- [Effective Programs for English Language Learners \(ELL\) with Interrupted Formal Education](#)
- [Evaluating Foreign Transcripts: The A-Z Manual](#)
- [Exemplary Programs for Newcomer English Language Learners at the Secondary Level](#)
- [Helping Newcomer Students Succeed in Secondary Schools and Beyond](#)
- [How to Support ELs with Interrupted Formal Education](#)
- [How to Support ELL Students with Interrupted Formal Education \(SIFEs\)](#)
- [Immigration and Acculturation in Adolescence](#)
- Marinho Kay, F., & Burns, M. B. (n.d.). (2024) *Learning with the Field: Understanding “Promising Practices” for Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education in Massachusetts Schools*.
- Salva, C., & Matis, A. (2017a). *Boosting achievement: Reaching students with interrupted or minimal education*. Seidlitz Education.
- [Sample SLIFE Student Success Plan, pages 14-16](#)
- [Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education \(SLIFE\) Identification Guidance \(Minnesota\)](#)
- [Students with Limited or Interrupted Formation Education \(SLIFE\) Definition and Guidance \(Massachusetts\)](#)
- [“Success for SLIFE!”](#)
- Seidlitz, J. & Perryman (2011). [QSSSA: The Secret Ingredient to Language-Rich, Interactive Classrooms](#)
- [Understanding and Supporting the Educational Needs of Recently Arrived Immigrant English Learner Students: Lessons for State and Local Education Agencies](#)
- [US Department of Education English Learner Toolkit](#)
- [US Department of Education Newcomer Toolkit](#)

WIDA Consortium. (2015) *WIDA Focus on SLIFE: Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education*