Students with Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education (SIFE)

Questions and Answers

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NYSED

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to support school districts throughout New York State (NYS) to improve the identification of and the provision of instructional services for Students with Interrupted/ Inconsistent Formal Education (SIFE), the Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages (OBEWL) has developed a collection of tools, including a Multilingual Literacy Screener (MLS). We believe that meeting the needs of SIFE is a considerable challenge. However, when SIFE are properly identified and provided appropriate supports and opportunities, they can strive to meet and surpass grade level standards.

Additional questions?
Please send questions or comments to the Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages
OBEWL@nysed.gov

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

Q: **What is the definition of SIFE in New York State?**

Under CR Part 154, a Student with Inconsistent/Interrupted Formal Education shall mean English Language Learners (ELLs) who have attended schools in the United States (the 50 States and the District of Columbia) for less than twelve months and who, upon initial enrollment in such schools, are two or more years below grade level in literacy in their home language and/or two or more years below grade level in Math due to inconsistent or interrupted schooling prior to arrival in the United States (the 50 States and the District of Columbia) [154-2.2(y)]. The definition above is inclusive of SIFE with developing literacy, students who have literacy at or below third grade in their home language. This means that they are not yet fluent readers in any language and do not independently use text as a resource to build new knowledge.

Q: **What does it mean to be two grade levels below the entering grade?**

For example, a student entering ninth grade is not expected to have home language literacy in ninth grade since they are just starting in that grade, so we would expect an entering 9th grader to have 8th grade literacy in home language. Therefore, home language literacy at 6th grade or below (not 7th) would make this student a SIFE.

Q: **What is the SIFE population in New York State?**

The SIFE population for the 2018-2019 school year is 3.5% of the total ELL population.

Q: **What are the SIFE New York State Top Spoken Languages in 2018-2019?**
- ✓ Spanish –66.9%
- ✓ Arabic – 8.2%
- ✓ Somali – 2.6%
- ✓ Bengali –2.5%
- ✓ Chinese – 2.4%
- ✓ Haitian Creole – 1.9%
- ✓ Karen – 1.6%
- ✓ French – 1.4%

Q: **Why is there a different category for SIFE?**

As their instruction has been interrupted, inconsistent, and sometimes unavailable, SIFE may have complex social and psychological needs due to possible traumatic migration experiences, frustrations with their academic delays in relation to their peers, a lack of familiarity with school culture, and feelings of isolation in school. Some may not possess the academic knowledge demonstrated by their peers who have consistently attended school. Schools are often unequipped to meet the complex needs of SIFE. As one of the

most vulnerable, at risk sub-groups of students, this population requires a commitment from all stakeholders to develop innovative approaches in order to appropriately serve them.

B. IDENTIFICATION AND PLACEMENT

Q: **What are the identification steps for SIFE?**

Schools in NYS should adhere to the following procedures:
- Administer the Home Language Questionnaire **(HLQ)**
- Conduct an individual interview
- Administer the New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners **(NYSITELL)**.

  For more information on the identification process visit:
  http://www.p12.nysed.gov/biling/bilinged/assessment.html

If the student was identified as an ELL and was found to be a potential SIFE during the administration of the HLQ and the individual interview, then:
- Administer the SIFE Oral Interview Questionnaire
- Administer the Multilingual Literacy SIFE Screener (MLS)
- Administer the Writing Screener.

  All SIFE materials can be found here:
  http://www.p12.nysed.gov/biling/bilinged/SIFE.html

Q: **What led to the creation of specific resources for SIFE identification?**

Previously, SIFE identification and placement methods varied across NYS. NYS schools and districts were utilizing an array of different methods to identify SIFE. Some schools and districts had no systems in place to identify and serve SIFE. Others had protocols to identify and serve SIFE but relied upon the discretion of individual schools to implement them. In addition, most available protocols for SIFE identification were translated into Spanish and not into other languages. Therefore, NYSED developed the following tools to help identify and serve SIFE including, the **Oral Interview Questionnaire** and **Guidance**, a **Writing Screener**, the **MLS**, and the **SIFE Curriculum**.

Q: **Should educators assume that students have oral or written proficiency in the language of their country of origin?**

No. For example, a Fula speaker from Guinea might not have oral language or literacy in French even though French is the official language of Guinea. This is the same with a

Quechua speaker in Spanish speaking country or a Garifuna speaker in some Central American countries where the predominant language is Spanish.

Q: **Will the home language of SIFE be reported to the state, and will there be a standard tool (rubric) for determining their literacy level?**

Yes, the home language should be captured for all ELLs via the [Student Information Repository System (SIRS)](). If the student is found to be a potential SIFE, as defined by CR Part 154 section 154-2.2(y), the **SIFE Oral Interview Questionnaire** should be administered, followed by the **Multilingual Literacy Screener (MLS)** to ascertain for SIFE home language literacy level, and the **Writing Screener** to identify students' basic writing skills .

Q: **Can a student be identified as a SIFE before the ELL classification?**

No. A district should follow the protocol established in the [CR Part 154 Regulations Chart for the identification of ELLs]() and then follow procedures for the identification of SIFE. The definition of SIFE under CR Part 154 section 154-2.2(y) identifies being an ELL as a threshold requirement.

Q: **Can SIFE be identified at any point, not just at enrollment?**

As part of the ELL identification process under CR Part 154-2.2(l) if an ELL student was identified as a potential SIFE, the SIFE screening, identification, and placement **must be completed at this time**. However, if for some reason a SIFE is not identified during the initial or reentry identification process as per CR Part 154-2.2(l), the ELL student can be identified as SIFE at any point **within twelve months** upon initial or reentry enrollment in such schools.

Q: **What are some challenges that SIFE may encounter that not all ELLs face?**

ELLs are assumed to have literacy and academic background knowledge at or close to grade level. Services for ELLs are targeted to support language acquisition. SIFE might face additional hurdles:

- In addition to learning English. SIFE often have not been exposed to the content knowledge that provides a foundation for participation in secondary school. They also do not have the home language literacy level of many secondary students. Instruction for SIFE must build language, literacy, and content knowledge.
- While the majority of non-SIFE ELLs have already learned to read in their first language and have also learned to use reading strategies, SIFE use rudimentary strategies to navigate their environment even though some have not yet learned to read print. Non-SIFE ELLs have acquired academic background knowledge that allows them to transfer this information to English, while SIFE have not had the opportunity to develop this knowledge.
- SIFE may not have been exposed to the same school behaviors and routines as other ELLs in regard to school environment. While the main obstacle in reading

for ELLs is English language acquisition, for SIFE it is both basic literacy and English language acquisition.

- Most ELLs have learned to use abstract thinking, while most low literacy SIFE have not yet learned to use these skills in a US secondary school setting and require additional support in building language, literacy, and appropriate content knowledge.

Q: What is the SIFE Oral Interview Questionnaire?

The SIFE Oral Interview Questionnaire provides an opportunity to learn more about the student, family, home background, educational history and literacy practices. The Questionnaire collects critical information on each student including variables such as age upon arrival, mobility, and years of schooling at time of entry into an English language school system in New York State. An accompanying **guidance document** to the Oral Interview Questionnaire is also available. The SIFE Oral Interview Questionnaire provides an opportunity to generate trust as a preparation for taking the MLS.

Q: What is the SIFE Writing Screener?

The purpose of this tool is to identify students' basic writing skills in their home language to assist with the screening of potential SIFE. This tool can be administered in a group, and students should be given a maximum of 15 minutes to complete their writing. Writing Screeners are available in 17 languages.

To access the entire list of languages available, please visit:
http://www.nysed.gov/bilingual-ed/students-interruptedinconsistent-formal-education-sife

Q: What is the MLS?

The MLS is one of the tools to be used in determining if a newly arrived ELL is designated as a SIFE. The MLS was produced in collaboration with the Research Institute for the Study of Language in Urban Society (RISLUS) of the City University of New York (CUNY). The MLS is a semi-adaptive online tool that reflects current literature-based curricula and didactic principles from students' home countries for grades three through nine. All sections have been produced by literacy experts, writers and editors who are native speakers of the above languages. The tool is currently available in 16 languages for the Reading Comprehension and Math components and may be available in more languages in the future as needed.

Q: What are some of the components of the MLS?

For some languages, the MLS has four components: Reading Comprehension, Math, Vocabulary, and Early Literacy modules. The Reading Comprehension module asks students to read passages of various types: literary, informational, functional, and persuasive, and answer both initial understanding and interpretation questions. The text types differ by language. The Vocabulary module tests students' knowledge of words in

context and synonyms. The MLS Vocabulary section for some languages also includes compound words and multiple meaning words. In some languages, vocabulary is embedded in the Reading Comprehension section. The following languages are available for each component:

Multilingual Literacy SIFE Screener Available Languages					
Reading Comprehension		Math		Vocabulary	Early Literacy
Arabic Bengali Burmese Chinese (Simplified) English French Fula Haitian Creole	Maay Maay Nepali Russian S'gaw Karen Somali Spanish Swahili Urdu	Arabic Bengali Burmese Chinese (Simplified) English French Fula Haitian Creole	Maay Maay Nepali Russian S'gaw Karen Somali Spanish Swahili Urdu	Chinese (Simplified) English Spanish Urdu	English Spanish

Q: **Should the MLS be administered in a district's central office?**

While it is recommended that the MLS be administered in individual schools, some districts will identify ELLs/SIFE at the central office. These districts should ensure that dedicated staff will be trained on the ELL and SIFE Identification process as well as the use of the Oral Interview Questionnaire and administration of the MLS. Training should be provided on administering the MLS. Some districts have a designated person within the central office responsible for the identification of ELLs (and SIFE), while others conduct the identification process with a certified professional in the morning or in the evening hours.

Q: **How can I access the MLS?**

The MLS can be accessed by clicking on the following link: https://mls.slalab.org. We recommend that users first study the two-page User Quicksheet document before accessing the MLS.

Q: **What are the procedures for SIFE who are also identified as Students with Disabilities?**

Districts/Schools should follow the protocol established in Commissioner's Regulations Subparts 154-2 and 154-3 for the identification of ELL students with disabilities and then follow procedures for the identification of SIFE.

C. CURRICULUM

Q: **What is the Literacy Curriculum for Low Literacy SIFE?**

The SIFE curriculum is a one-year intervention for newcomer adolescents who arrive in US schools with limited academic preparation and low levels of home language literacy. The curriculum targets SIFE with Developing Literacy (SDL), SIFE with home language literacy at or below third grade, regardless of the chronological grade they are in. The curriculum enables teachers to prepare LL SIFE with the foundational language, literacy skills and content knowledge needed to succeed in mainstream secondary school classes.

Q: **How can a district/school gain access to the SIFE curriculum?**

Access to the NYS SIFE Curriculum requires a strong commitment by school administrators and a team of teachers, willing to attend a series of professional development sessions. A school interested in the NYS SIFE Curriculum can contact the Bridges professional development team to find out if the school is a good match for the curriculum. If it is, a school team is invited to participate on a series of professional development sessions, either joining a year-long cohort that begins in September or an orientation session series that will be offered in the fall. For more information, please contact Bridges at admin@bridges-sifeproject.com.

Additional questions?

For additional information on SIFE, see http://www.p12.nysed.gov/biling/bilinged/SIFE.html

Please send questions or comments to the
Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages.
OBEWL@nysed.gov OR
The Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (RBERN)

For more information about the Multilingual Literacy SIFE Screener, read the MLS User Manual
Technical support is available from the MLS Support Team at mls.server.email@gmail.com

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