



Students with Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education (SIFE)

Questions and Answers

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Curriculum



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INTRODUCTION

In an effort to support school districts throughout New York State to improve the identification and the provision of instructional services for Students with Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education (SIFE), the Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages (OBEWL) is launching a collection of tools, including a Multilingual Literacy Screener (MLS). We believe that meeting the needs of SIFE is a considerable challenge, however, when students are properly identified and provided with the 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
OBEFLS@nysed.gov

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

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

Under the new 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 Low Literacy SIFE, 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 2014-2015 school year is 8.7% of the total ELL population.

Q: What are the SIFE New York State Top Spoken Languages in 2014-2015?

- ✓ Spanish – 64.0%
- ✓ Arabic – 5.9%
- ✓ Chinese – 5.3%
- ✓ Haitian Creole – 4.1%
- ✓ Bengali – 4.0%
- ✓ Karen – 3.0%
- ✓ French – 2.0%
- ✓ Burmese – 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.

Q: What has changed for SIFE under the new CR Part 154 regulations?

If the student is identified as an ELL, and the Home Language Questionnaire (HLQ) indicates that the student has attended school in the United States (the 50 States and the District of Columbia) for less than twelve months and is two or more years below grade level in literacy in their home language and/or math due to inconsistent or interrupted schooling prior to arrival in the United States (the 50 States and the District of Columbia), the student shall also be identified as a Student with Inconsistent/Interrupted Formal Education. [CR Section 154-2.2 (y)]

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 the SIFE Oral Interview Questionnaire, the Multilingual Literacy SIFE Screener (MLS), and the Writing Screener should be administered. All SIFE materials can be found here:

<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/biling/bilinged/SIFE.html>

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

Previously, SIFE identification and placement methods varied across NYS; therefore, 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. NYSED has developed the following tools to help identify and serve SIFE including: [The Oral Interview Questionnaire](#) and [Guidance](#), a [Writing Screener](#) and the [SIFE Curriculum](#).

Q: Should educators assume that speakers of indigenous languages have oral or written proficiency in the dominant 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. This is the same with a Quechua speaker in Spanish speaking country or a Garifuna speaker in some Central American countries.

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, according to 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.

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.

Q: Can SIFE be identified at any point in the semester, not just at enrollment?

Yes, as long as it follows the appropriate prescribed guidelines in the Part 154 Regulations, which establish that the process for initial enrollment or reentry identification and parent notification, orientation, and placement shall be completed such that a student is placed in either a Bilingual Education or an English as a New Language program within ten (10) school days after the student's initial enrollment or reentry in the school district. [154-2.3(g)(1)]

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 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 MLS?

The MLS and the SIFE Writing Screener, are 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 Arabic, Bangla, Chinese Simplified, English, Haitian Creole, S'gaw Karen, Maay Maay, and Spanish, 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 two components: Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary. 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	Vocabulary
Two Components	English	English
	Simplified Mandarin Chinese	Simplified Mandarin Chinese
	Spanish	Spanish
	Urdu	Urdu
One Component	Arabic	
	Bangla	
	Haitian Creole	
	Maay-Maay	
	S'gaw Karen	

Q: Could 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 ID 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. 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 the following languages: Arabic, Bangla, Chinese-Simplified, English, Haitian-Creole, S'gaw Karen, Maay Maay, Spanish, and Urdu.

Q: How can I access the MLS?

The MLS can be accessed by clicking on the following link: mls.gc.cuny.edu . We recommend that users first study the two-page 'Quicksheet' document before attempting to log in to 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 LL SIFE (low literacy SIFE), 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 Annie Smith at annie@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.

OBEFLS@nysed.gov

OR

[The Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network \(RBERN\)](#)

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