

**SLIFE *Quick Reference*: Definition and Instructional/Program Considerations**

**Who Are SLIFE?**

Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) are English Learners who:

* Have fewer than two years of age-appropriate, curriculum-based schooling, OR
* Have experienced extended interruptions in schooling (migration, displacement, re-enrollment abroad), AND
* Demonstrate gaps in literacy, numeracy, and/or academic knowledge compared with grade-level peers.

**Identification criteria in PA**

A student may be identified as SLIFE if they meet all of the following (this is contained in the full [K-12 identification procedure](https://www.pa.gov/agencies/education/programs-and-services/instruction/elementary-and-secondary-education/curriculum/educating-english-learners/screening-identification-and-placement.html)):

* Is enrolling after grade two, AND
* Has a literacy score of less than 3.5 on the MODEL Screener or WIDA Screener, AND
* Has at least two fewer years of age-appropriate schooling than peers **or** has disenrolled from U.S. schools to enroll in schools in other countries (including Puerto Rico) more than two times in the past four years, AND
* Has limited encoding/decoding skills in their native language (as indicated by the family interview and/or native language measures and/or review of academic records and/or local measures)

**Tools:** Records review, family/student interviews, screeners, observations.

**Instructional Principles**

* **Accelerate, don’t remediate.**
  + Keep students in age-appropriate grades while filling gaps. It is inappropriate to place a SLIFE in a lower grade level to receive appropriate academic instruction, even though instruction might need to cover standards from lower grades.
* **SLIFE May need modifications to academic content along with language support**
  + ELs *without* limited or interrupted schooling must receive instruction aligned to grade-level content standards. SLIFE, however, may need instruction tied to lower-grade standards to address gaps in skills and knowledge. The goal is to meet them where they are while planning intentionally for *accelerated* progress toward grade-level proficiency across all content areas.
* **Integrate language and content.**
  + SLIFE are a subgroup of English learners, so appropriate language instruction along with content instruction is necessary.
* **Provide explicit literacy support.** Teach both decoding and comprehension. SLIFE often have limited literacy skills. Explicit instruction in these skills may be necessary. Examples include:
  + Decoding: Direct phonics instruction, phonemic awareness, syllable segmentation, word building with common prefixes/suffixes.
  + Fluency: Repeated reading of short passages, choral reading, paired reading with peers.
  + Comprehension: Modeling “think-alouds,” teaching text structures (narrative vs. expository), using graphic organizers, summarization practice.
  + Vocabulary: Pre-teaching high-utility academic words, semantics and knowledge-building, affixing and connecting cognates where possible.

**NOTE:** *It may be necessary for a reading specialist or similarly trained professional to provide literacy support to SLIFE. Districts should consider ways to make this support available, especially at the secondary level, where such services are often less common.*

* **Leverage home languages.** Translanguaging, bilingual resources, peer supports.
* **Use multimodal strategies.** Visuals, hands-on tasks, realia.

**Secondary & Program Considerations**

* **Credit accrual:** Award partial or competency-based credit at the time of enrollment where possible. Consider assessing knowledge and skills with local or other purchased assessments if available to award credit. When determining a student’s knowledge and skills, districts may consider both formal education and relevant lived experiences.
* **Flexible scheduling:** Extended day, summer school, online options.
* **Placement:** Do not place older SLIFE outside of age-appropriate grades.
* **Support structures:** Newcomer programs, co-teaching, after-school tutoring, mentoring.

**Social-Emotional Supports**

* Build belonging and safety.
* Teach the “hidden curriculum” (school routines, academic skills).
  + SLIFE often require explicit instruction in aspects of schooling that other students and educators may take for granted, such as:
    - Navigating school schedules and rotating classes
    - Understanding homework routines and expectations for independent practice
    - Learning instructional norms (turn-taking, raising hands, group work roles)
    - Using school systems and materials (lockers, IDs, technology platforms, cafeteria routines)
    - Developing academic skills like notetaking, test-taking strategies, and asking for help
* Recognize and incorporate cultural knowledge whenever possible.

**Key Takeaways**

* SLIFE = unique needs, not deficits.
* Identification requires multiple data sources. It’s critical to investigate the academic background and experiences of SLIFE to determine needs.
* Instruction = accelerated, scaffolded, and asset-based.
* Program flexibility ensures access to graduation and/or postsecondary pathways.

**Resources**

August, D., & Shanahan, T. (Eds.). (2006). *Developing literacy in second-language learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

New York State Education Department (2011). *Topic Brief: Students with Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education (SIFE).* Albany, NY: Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages. Retrieved from [https://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/programs/bilingual-ed/topic-brief-sife-a.pdf](https://www.nysed.gov/sites/default/files/programs/bilingual-ed/topic-brief-sife-a.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

TNTP. (2021). *Disrupting barriers to strong instructional scaffolding.* Brooklyn, NY: The New Teacher Project. Retrieved from [https://tntp.org/wp-content/uploads/Tools/disrupting-barriers-to-strong-instructional-scaffolding.pdf](https://tntp.org/wp-content/uploads/Tools/disrupting-barriers-to-strong-instructional-scaffolding.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

van de Pol, J., & Ellis, R. (2023). *Scaffolding English language learners: A systematic review.* Frontiers in Education, 8, 1341846. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1341846>