



Focus: Virtual Learning for English Learners Receiving Special Education Services

CEEL continues to provide Education and Research Supports for ELs during COVID-19. This is the eighth publication in our Communication series based on CEEL's research-based [Equitable Distance Learning for English Learners Design Principles](#).

- **Voices from the Field** - highlighting educators' commendable and steadfast efforts to serve English Learners and Dual Language Learners in virtual learning spaces during these unprecedented times;
- **Resources and Research** -curated resources focused on ELs/DLLs across a variety of topics such as social and emotional learning, highlights of best practices for distance learning, instructional materials, professional learning in virtual spaces, leadership, and family-school partnerships.



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

A Voice from the Field – Vanessa Lopez

Vanessa has been an educator for 18 years and in her present role as Coordinator for the [Imperial Valley SELPA](#) (Special Education Local Plan Area) she partners with teachers to support their work with a high population of students who are dually-identified, English Learners who receive Special Education services. She is dedicated to the students and their families in the largely rural, agricultural communities in the Imperial County. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Vanessa's approach was to encourage teachers to explore and be creative with technology but to keep the focus on pedagogy that supports [content learning and language acquisition](#). Realizing that the transition in Spring 2020 to virtual teaching and learning was something new for teachers, administrators, students, and families and “*truly a shock to everyone's system*”, Vanessa had to respond to field requests coming in from school sites, and reply with suggestions that were responsive to the unique needs of dually-identified special education students and that could be accomplished with resources that teachers already had and those that could be accessed right away. Alongside teachers, she has co-constructed solutions while challenging herself and educators to replicate the social interaction our students really need, monitor student learning, and hold students accountable without overwhelming them.

English Learners and SPED: Resources and Research

California's student population is diverse and often has complex educational needs that have been heightened by [distance learning](#). There are nearly [1.2 million English Learners in California](#). Approximately [16.6 percent](#) of these English Learners have also been classified as students with disabilities, compared to 12 percent of California's students who qualified for special education services. Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) continue to explore ways to appropriately [identify, assess, determine eligibility](#) and provide services for dually-identified English Learners receiving special education services.

A critical element of [Assets-Oriented and Needs-Responsive Schools](#) stipulated in the *California English Learner Roadmap Policy* is the commitment to develop a [collaborative framework](#) for identifying English learners with disabilities that includes valid assessment practices. As LEAs continue to address the challenges of the [triple pandemic](#), schools and districts need to operationalize this framework in [collaboration with families](#) as they develop and implement appropriate Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) that addresses academic goals and take into account student language development.

In each of our communications we will continue to highlight voices from the field and education and research resources.

Visit our [CEEL Website](#) to learn more about our research, professional development, policy work, and programs. Contact us at ceel@lmu.edu with comments, additional resources, or to share your story.



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VOICES FROM THE FIELD

***“Being an English Learner is NOT a Disability”:* Insights on Virtual Learning for Dually-Identified Students**

Vanessa Lopez is in her second year as a Coordinator for the [Imperial Valley SELPA](#) (Special Education Local Plan Area) and most recently worked at a school site in the [Calexico Unified School District](#) as a classroom teacher with general education students as well as in the Resource Specialist Program (RSP) and Special Day Class (SDC) settings. Vanessa’s experiences as an EL coach, a resource teacher, an academic support teacher, and an educational technology integration specialist have uniquely positioned her to provide valuable support in the pivot to distance learning.

An Asset-Based Approach Focused on the Whole Child

Vanessa tells us, *“It is important to remember that being an English Learner is not a disability.”* Vanessa challenges us to see each person’s experiences, culture and language to *“mine the assets that are there.”* Of the [13 categories of disabilities](#), the largest type is the Specific Learning Disability (SLD). Vanessa reminds us that many identified disabilities do not limit language learning and will not impact students’ progress in English language proficiency.

In her work with teachers of dually-identified students, Vanessa emphasizes the importance of each student’s [Individualized Education Program](#) (IEP), but also stresses the importance of getting to know each student as a whole individual coming from a unique context. Given the spectrum of moderate to severe needs, educators need to focus on current levels of performance and data that inform the baseline - especially important if there is no data from English Language Proficiency Assessments for California ([ELPAC](#)) or other locally identified measures. Then, educators can develop linguistically appropriate goals specific to the needs of each student. Vanessa advises teachers to look for red flags if the IEP is written with deficit language. She says, *“What I want everyone to keep at the forefront is that we’re talking about and working with individuals with diverse identity dimensions, gender, culture, the whole nine [yards].”* Thus, considering who each child is uniquely and their unique gifts is of key importance in building their learning plans.

Leveraging Teachers’ Collective Innovation – “Building the Plane While We Fly”

Vanessa supports teachers’ creative use of technology, insisting on [research-based pedagogy](#) for ELs with disabilities. Along with teachers, she co-constructs innovative adaptations of existing apps and devices that integrate technology, content learning and language acquisition. Vanessa shares two approaches to keeping [Universal Design for Learning](#) in the forefront in one high school and one elementary school classroom.

Optimizing Digital Modes and Tools to Meet Outcomes – Vanessa describes her collaboration with a high school history teacher who has students with active IEPs and who transformed the use of existing resources using an [app smashing](#) strategy – combining two or three apps to get a desired result. This teacher adapted his virtual classroom to resemble his physical classroom. Before the pandemic, he used [Google Suite](#), which he continues to use while teaching on Zoom. He posts updates, needed documents, and reminders, Google Slides, and Google Docs. In the physical classroom, he used side-by-side translation for ELs with disabilities. Wanting to transform and translate his notes and slides prior to delivering online instruction, he and Vanessa discovered the [Slide Translator](#) extension to highlight text and select the language students need for text comprehension. He keeps the translation on a side panel for continuous reference, which for special education students with executive functioning issues alleviates having to toggle to a separate tab.

For students with visual motor integration issues, this teacher uses [Read and Write](#) purchased by his district. In addition to switching between the written English and Spanish text, ELs can plug in headphones, listen to the slides read aloud multiple times, attuning their ears to English while following along visually. They can simultaneously practice their reading skills in the primary language. He’s combined this with the use of [Screencastify](#) for students to record and send questions orally in real time to their teacher. The “aha” moment for the teacher was that students could be taught to use these strategies independently for all classes. Vanessa emphasized that students are not only learning content via technology, but they are learning *“life hacks that will help them in their academic journey.”*

Maximizing Comprehensibility and Interactions – With her elementary students, one fourth grade general education teacher - like many others - is using paper and pencil tasks in addition to synchronous virtual spaces. Parents or students pick up materials. Students use their workbooks, snap a picture, and submit it to their teacher. Special



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Education teachers then meet with the student to work on specific goals and adjust material based on accommodations specified in their IEP. Technology supports like Speech to Text in [Google Chrome](#) help the students meet grade level standards during [integrated ELD](#). To support students' writing, they can use speech to text, run it through [Grammarly](#), and then make the revisions and edits for English conventions. This process represents an integration of essential California Common Core State Standards for [English Language Arts](#) (e.g. W.4.4-6 *Production and Distribution of Writing*) and CA [English Language Development Standards](#) (e.g. ELD.PI.4.10. *Expanding – Writing*).

For younger dually-identified students during designated ELD time, chants, songs work well in the virtual environment to develop phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and uplift students' backgrounds. The lessons encourage students to "play" with language and tap into personal experiences. Younger students may not have mastered using the mouse or keyboard, thus many extension activities are completed with physical "drag and drop" or circling on the iPad. Some teachers are using platforms like Seesaw where students can use tools on a touch-screen device to show what they know by recording videos, taking pictures, and drawing.

"Don't Sweat the Small Stuff"

Amid what has been an enormous change for teachers, Vanessa has a straightforward approach. She advises us to "use what we have in our pantry" to look at existing resources and adapt them to our new context. She wisely tells educators and district leaders, "It's about one thing at a time." It is easy to get overwhelmed by uncertainty and to-do lists, but, *"if we focus on one thing at a time – doing a deep dive into one IEP at a time, getting to know one disability category at a time, one feature in Zoom and perfecting it, or getting to know one app specific to students with auditory processing issues,"* virtual teaching and learning can be more manageable.

There are still questions unanswered and critical needs to be met, but Vanessa reminds us to look for the bright spots. She is overwhelmed with emotion and amazement at what is being achieved; she says, *"multiply that times 100, by 1000s throughout the state, throughout our country. And to me, that's just great!"*



Addressing the Whole Child

In addressing the whole individual, Vanessa points to the example of one teacher in an SDC classroom (grades 4 – 6) who took a deep dive into her students' IEPs before the new school year began. In addition to familiarizing herself with the AT (Assistive Technology) section to guide how she might adapt programs and apps, she realized the critical social-emotional needs of her students. Every morning, this teacher checks in with her students to find out how they are feeling, and, additionally, to build community. The teacher then artfully transitions to

some physical movement which relaxes the students. This primes the brain and the body to be engaged, receptive to new learning, and for students to express what they know. To further ensure that the needs of her students are met, this teacher maximizes the support of her two Instructional Assistants. If, for example, one of the IEP goals says to develop writing, they plan Zoom breakout sessions that include writing models, and slides with sentence frames and word banks. As a core instructional component, they group strategically by language proficiency to provide additional supports during designated ELD time.



Addressing Unique Family Needs

As the parent of a dually-identified autistic son, Vanessa fully understands the challenges they face and brings this unique perspective in working with families. The pivot to virtual learning in a largely rural, agricultural county that currently is experiencing a widespread transmission of COVID-19 has been challenging for everybody, especially for families of students with disabilities. However, Vanessa reports that every school site was able to provide devices and upgrade some mobile towers and vehicles to provide connectivity. There is still work to be done -

the demand for internet bandwidth has increased exponentially; students need devices and bandwidth that can handle multiple users in households with multiple children. Families continue to reach out with their distinct stories and needs; for many, family members have contracted the virus, lost work, or had to return to Mexico for support. Vanessa emphasizes the uniqueness of each family and appreciates the experiences, assets, and resilience they bring to the table; this is especially evident in families of dually-identified students. She is moved to see *"the way the human connection is so important, highlighted, and how many people are just making outstanding efforts."*



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RESEARCH AND RESOURCES

During distance learning, [many districts have reported increased difficulties](#) in meeting the needs of students with disabilities and complying with requirements of federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). To this end, CEEL has curated several resources to empower educators and school communities to be responsive to the unique opportunities as stated in the [CA Practitioners' Guide for Educating English Learners with Disabilities](#), *"to promote equity and access for English learner students with suspected disabilities and for those already identified."* These resources include research based [guidance tools](#) for administrators and educators that will build capacity and develop systems to build Family-School partnerships to collaborate during distance learning, centering around the success of English Learners with unique abilities.

Title: Assistive Technology for Remote Teaching and Learning: Ctrl Alt Achieve

Link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WCJ6Ohv-vhZ_8r2G6qSu2NpA9B-DoHFop/view

Summary: This resource from Imperial County SELPA, offers a wide range of tools and resources to support students with disabilities. Educators can view the webinar to learn how to leverage these resources to support English Learners through distance learning.

Title: California Practitioners' Guide for Educating English Learners with Disabilities

Link: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/ac/documents/ab-2785guide.pdf>

Summary: This publication from the California Department of Education offers guidance for educators and school communities to identify, refer, support, assess, and reclassify English learners with disabilities (CDE).

Title: Can Special Needs Children Be Bilingual?

Link: <https://youtu.be/vOhWgOYeIMs>

Summary: In this video, John Consalvi, CEO/Founder of LinguaHealth and Dr. Brenda Gorman discuss the importance of maintaining a child's native language, and the evidence that bilingualism benefits the communicative potential of children with special needs.

Title: COVID-19 School Closures Supporting Students with Disabilities

Link: <https://sharemylesson.com/sites/default/files/SML-StudentsDisabilities-Interactive.pdf>

Summary: This publication from the American Federation of Teachers provides educators with an overview of key points to keep in mind as they provide services to diverse students with special needs. This publication also provides a list of resources, apps and websites as well as digital accommodations and recommendations.

Title: English Learners and Special Education

Link: https://www.understood.org/pages/en/school-learning/special-services/english-language-learners/?ul=1*1e1ffy1*domain_userid*YW1wLTVmVkMwX1hiWm-5waVU1RnZoVEdVR1E_

Summary: The Understood website presents a series of articles related to English Learners around the topic of Special Education, testing, cultural perspectives, and bilingualism. This website is available in multiple languages through Google Translate.



Title: English Learners with Disabilities: Shining a Light on Dual-Identified Students

Link: <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/english-learners-disabilities-shining-light-du-al-identified-students/>

Summary: This brief from New America provides an overview of the federal policies that determine services available for English Learners and students with disabilities. Key opportunities for equity are presented to identify English Learners with disabilities.

Title: Exploring Equity Issues: Language Difference or Language Disorder? ELs and Special Education

Link: <https://maec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Exploring-Equity-ELs-and-Special-Ed-1.pdf>

Summary: This brief from the Center for Education Equity MAEC provides educators with an overview of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) criteria to determine if a child is learning disabled. Considerations for referral processes and English Learner placement in Special Education are presented.

Title: Forward Together: Helping Educators Unlock the Power of Students who Learn Differently

Link: <https://nclld.org/research/forward-together>

Summary: This report from the National Center for Learning Disabilities, presents mindsets and practices that help educators reach students with learning and attention issues. Eight key practices are discussed, including culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy that can inform best practices for English Learners.

Title: Identifying English Learners with Disabilities

Link: https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/infographics/pdf/REL_NEI_Identifying_English_Learners_with_Disabilities.pdf

Summary: This infographic from the Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast & Islands provides three evidence-based recommendations to help identify when an English Learner may have a disability. Several other resource guides and research publications are also provided.

**Title: Imperial County SELPA**

Link: <https://www.icoe.org/selpa/resources/resources-families-community>

Summary: The Imperial County SELPA offers a plethora of resources to support English Learners with disabilities. Educators and school leaders can access resources, webinars, websites, tutorials and more. The resource section includes topics ranging from Assistive Technology to Family and Communities.

Title: Learning and Thinking Differences in English Language Learners

Link: <https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/special-services/english-language-learners/understanding-learning-and-thinking-differences-in-ells>

Summary: This article from Understood provides educators and parents an overview about key areas to consider for English Learners with learning and processing differences. This article is available in Spanish through Google Translate, and can be used to support parents as they explore their child's learning journey.

Title: Meeting the Needs of English Learners (ELs) with Disabilities Resource Book

Link: https://www.mcoe.org/deptprog/SPED/Documents/Resources/EL-SPED%20Resource%20Book%20Revised%202017%20Final_.pdf

Summary: This resource book from the SELPA Administrators is an informative tool for regular and special educators to assist them in meeting the needs of English Learners who have been identified or are in the process of being identified for special education services.

Title: Online Strategies for Special Education Teachers IDEA & eLuma Webinar

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X3Pw_O9J-diA&feature=youtu.be

Summary: Presented by the Illinois Digital Educators Alliance and eLuma Online Therapy, this webinar provides recommendations to implement effective live online instruction for all students. Practical suggestions and strategies are offered to strengthen instruction to support English Learners with disabilities. Strategies to increase asynchronous engagement for students and parents are also discussed. Important self-care and mental wellness strategies while working from home are also highlighted.

Title: Preparing to Reopen: Six Principles That Put Equity at the Core

Link: <https://www.gettingsmart.com/2020/05/preparing-to-reopen-six-principles-that-put-equity-at-the-core/>

Summary: This article from Getting Smart discusses six principles for inclusive preparation for the new year, that positions equity, empathy and the needs of students with disabilities at the center.

Title: Preschool English Learners, 2nd Edition- Principles and Practices to Promote Language, Literacy and Learning

Link: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/Sp/cd/re/documents/pseng-learnersed2.pdf>

Summary: This publication from the California Department of Education provides research highlights in order to differentiate language differences versus language disorders. In particular, Chapter 7 focuses on English Learners with disabilities or other special needs.

Title: 6 ways to support students with disabilities during COVID-19 school closures

Link: <https://www.nwea.org/blog/2020/6-ways-to-support-students-with-disabilities/>

Summary: This article from NWEA discusses the importance of accessibility and accommodations in distance learning that educators can leverage to enhance instruction for dually identified students.

Title: Teacher's View of Assistive Technology

Link: <https://www.ctdinstitute.org/library/2018-06-07/teachers-view-assistive-technology>

Summary: This video from the Center for Technology and Disability provides educators with considerations for assistive technology that can help students with a range of learning needs. A Spanish translation of the video is available.

Title: Strategies to Identify and Support English Learners with Learning Disabilities: Review of Research and State Practices

Link: https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/infographics/pdf/REL_NEI_Identifying_English_Learners_with_Disabilities.pdf

Summary: This review of research and state practices from the Regional Educational Laboratory at WestEd offers guidance to aid educators and administrators in identifying and supporting EL students with learning disabilities.

Title: Supporting Children with Autism during COVID-19 (A Guide for Families and Educators)

Link: <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/supporting-children-autism-during-covid-19>

Summary: Reading Rockets provides a guide for parents and educators of children with autism. It includes a multitude of resources for supporting literacy and social emotional issues at home as well as links to instructional modules and toolkits to help families cope as professional support services might be reduced or unavailable during the Covid-19 closure of schools and centers.

Title: Using Conscious Discipline Strategies/Resources During School Closure

Link: <https://youtu.be/6KqJmMTFuf0>

Summary: Presented by the Imperial County SELPA, this bilingual presentation features Dr. Becky A. Bailey and presents strategies that can be used to enhance social and emotional learning, culture and climate, and self-regulation. These strategies help establish positive and caring environments in the classroom and at home, during school closure times, to support English Learners and students with disabilities.

Title: Wide Open Schools

Link: <https://wideopenschool.org/search/?swp=english+learners&audience=families-and-teachers>

Summary: Powered by Common Sense, Wide Open Schools is a curated, free and open collection of the best online learning resources for students. They offer a wide variety of topics and grade levels for educators, families, and resources in Spanish. This section offers articles focused on English Learners and resources for teachers and families.