

Frequently Asked Questions

- How are ESL students identified?

All students complete a home language survey upon initial entry into the school system. If a language other than English is the answer to any question on the survey the student is identified as Non-English Language Background (NELB) and his/her language proficiency is assessed. Students who test less than proficient in English are identified as English Language Learners (ELL) and qualify for ESL program services.

- Why must every NELB student be assessed?

The Bilingual Act of 1988 requires that all students whose first language is other than English be assessed for language proficiency.

- What if the student speaks English well? Must this student be assessed?

Yes. Students must be assessed in all four domains of language – speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Students who can communicate in English may not read or write in English at the level needed for success in school.

- If a student qualifies for ESL services, do parents have to accept the program?

No. Once a student has been assessed and qualifies for the ESL program, a parent or guardian may choose to *waive* program services by signing a *waiver* form. One copy of the form is placed in the student's permanent folder and another in the ESL office files.

- Does *waiving* services remove a child from ELL classification?

No. A waiver only removes the ELL student from ESL program instruction. All state and federal testing requirements for ELL students remain in place.

- Are students taught in their native language?

No. All instruction is in English, not the native language.

- What do non-English background students need for school registration?

Students will need a birth certificate or other proof of birth date such as a passport or I-94. They will also need a Tennessee immunization record and proof of where they are residing with their parent or legal guardian in Rutherford County.

- May a student attend school if he or she is living with someone who is not a parent or legal guardian?

Unless the student qualifies as “homeless”, it is necessary for the student to live with a parent or legal guardian to enroll in school. Legal guardianship can only be transferred through the juvenile court system. A power of attorney signed by the parent does not give an individual legal custody of a child.

- If a student is 18 years old and did not finish school in his or her home country, can he/she attend school in Rutherford County?

A student who is 18 years old is considered an adult. Any new 18-year-old student who has not been enrolled in an American high school will be referred to Adult Education (904-3876).

- How can a non-English speaking parent get assistance to register a child in school?

Many of the schools have bilingual educational assistants to help parents with registration. If assistance is not available at the school, call the ESL office at 893-5815, extension 22084, and assistance will be provided. Spanish speaking parents may call 893-5815, extension 22093 for assistance.