

Help: Assessing English- and Dual-Language Learners

English- and dual-language learners are children who are developing the ability to understand and speak more than one language. Some children begin learning English for the first time when they enroll in preschool, while others have been introduced to English from an early age by family members. To assess the knowledge and development of English- and dual-language learners accurately, it is important first to determine the primary language(s) of the children.

The “Home Language Survey” is designed to help teachers gather and record useful information about the language(s) children have been exposed to in the home environment and the language(s) children use at home and at school. This information assists teachers in planning ways to support children’s language and literacy acquisition and in basing instruction on children’s strengths and needs. Teachers discuss the questions with parents or other family members (with the assistance of interpreters if necessary), and they determine the answers to the questions together. The survey should not be completed by teachers without input from parents or other family members.

The data gathered with this “Home Language Survey” should not be used to label children or identify them for special services. It should be used to help the teacher determine how to assess children most accurately and support their development and learning. The “Home Language Survey” is a resource of the *Teaching Strategies GOLD*® assessment system, not a requirement. If parents do not wish to provide this information or complete the survey with you, their wishes should be respected.

Respond to each question by using the scale ranging from “only English” to “only home language.” When “Home Language Survey” results indicate that use of Objective 37, “Demonstrates progress in listening to and understanding English,” and Objective 38, “Demonstrates progress in speaking English” is appropriate, they are automatically added to the child’s record.

Objectives 37 and 38 are not appropriate for assessing children younger than 3 years. However, answers from the “Home Language Survey” may still be collected as useful background information to assist you in planning and individualizing learning experiences for the child.

For all of the objectives other than those for language and literacy, it is ideal to assess children’s skills by documenting their knowledge and skills when they respond in their *preferred languages*, the languages they choose at particular times to show what they know and can do. For example, if a child can count to ten in Spanish and counts five objects accurately, using one number name for each

object, then he or she is considered as being at level 4 of Objective 20a, “Counts.”

While it is preferable to assess in a child’s home language, it is not always possible because of limited program resources and the multitude of languages spoken the classroom. When you do not speak the child’s home language, it is even more important to partner with family members and other trained volunteers who speak the child’s language to gather information. While you are still responsible for collecting assessment information, the observations shared by those who speak the child’s language can be invaluable in helping you assess the child’s development and learning accurately.

In addition, you can gather data about many objectives by observing, even if you do not speak the child’s home language. These objectives are considered *language-free* objectives because they do not require children to comprehend or produce English to demonstrate what they know or can do. For example, you may gather information related to Objective 1b, “Follows limits and expectations,” when a child begins cleaning up in response to a musical cue. During cleanup, you could also observe to see whether the child sustains attention to a task over time (Objective 11a, “Attends and engages”).

Some of the math objectives are also language free. When a child creates or extends a simple repeating pattern, you can collect information related to Objective 23, “Demonstrates knowledge of patterns.” Review the objectives and dimensions to determine those for which you can gather data without speaking the child’s language. This will also help you identify the *language-dependent* objectives for which you need assistance from family members or trained volunteers.

The language objectives (8–10) and literacy objectives (15–19) are measured from an English-language perspective. For example, is the child able to understand and follow directions in English? Does the child recognize letters of the alphabet when they are named in English? For children whose home language is Spanish, using a Spanish-language version of these objectives is included as an option for each child, to help teachers track language and literacy development in Spanish. These objectives are very similar to the English version of these language and literacy objectives, but adaptations were made to reflect patterns of development unique to Spanish language and literacy.

Language and literacy objectives are included only for Spanish and English. Data about children’s use of languages other than English and Spanish must therefore be gathered informally if its collection is a program requirement.

Related Articles:

- [Download the “Home Language Survey” in English or Spanish](#)
- [Research Base of the “Home Language Survey”](#)
- [Using the “Home Language Survey”](#)