



**RIDE** Rhode Island  
Department  
of Education



**SUPPORTING MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS WITH  
INCONSISTENT/INTERRUPTED FORMAL EDUCATION (SIFE)**

**A PRACTICAL APPROACH FOR RHODE ISLAND EDUCATORS**



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## INTRODUCTION

Multilingual/English Learners (MLLs/ELs) are often categorized together as one group in the PK-12 setting despite their diverse linguistic, cultural, and academic backgrounds. Students with interrupted formal education (SIFE), who are a small subset of MLLs/ELs, are newcomers to the United States who have had limited, interrupted, minimal or no formal education in their countries of origins due to circumstances such as war, natural disaster, poverty, political unrest, or lack of resources. According to estimates from the American Community Survey (2016), 72% of MLLs/ELs are U.S. born while 28% have come to the U.S. as immigrants, refugees, and asylees (U.S. Dept. of Ed. Newcomer Toolkit, 2016). While many have come with their families, some have arrived unaccompanied (Menjivar & Perreira, 2017). The majority of SIFE are enrolled in grades 6-12 and are particularly more vulnerable as they have limited time to master all the challenging academic content and fulfill the requirements for graduation and succeed on standardized assessments needed for graduation (Hos, 2016; Short & Boyson, 2012). Although SIFE may have had interruptions in their education, many arrive with “funds of knowledge”-“historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez, 1992, p. 133). Some examples of funds of knowledge that SIFE may possess can include experience in certain trades such as agriculture, construction, carpentry, masonry, painting, money-handling, and religious knowledge. Educators of SIFE should capitalize on their funds of knowledge and use them as a foundation for teaching new skills and concepts. This practical approach provides Rhode Island educators with actionable steps on practice and procedures to meet the social, emotional, linguistic, and academic needs of SIFE.

The first section of this practical approach provides some background information on SIFE. The second section provides tools and actionable steps for the identification of SIFE. The last section provides tools and resources for administrators of ESL programming, teachers of SIFE, and community resources for SIFE.

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## Definition of SIFE<sup>1</sup>

Students with interrupted formal education (SIFE) are often characterized as:

being over-age for their grade-level placement due to their limited or interrupted formal schooling

having needs that traditional ESL and bilingual programs may not be able to meet

having low or sometimes no literacy in their first language and/or in English and have little academic content-area knowledge

functioning two or more years below expected grade level both in native language literacy and numeracy compared to peers

needing extra supports and approaches that will help them catch up with their peers

being at risk of dropping out of school

## Factors affecting SIFE

### Adjustment Factors

- Lack of awareness of school culture and norms
- Lack of knowledge of school discipline policies, graduation requirements, and high-stakes testing

### Affective Factors

- Possible victim of violence
- May need counseling
- Require cultural adjustment support
- May live in poverty
- Need connection to community support

### Academic Factors

- Possibly little or no previous education
- May need basic skill development in literacy and numeracy
- Gaps in content knowledge due to interruptions in education

<sup>1</sup> The definition and characteristics were developed using definitions of SIFE by DeCapua, Smathers, & Tang, 2009; Freeman & Freeman, 2002; U.S. Dept. of Education Newcomer Toolkit (2016); WIDA SIFE Focus (2015).



## SIFE Pre-Screener and Interview<sup>2</sup>

The SIFE Pre-Screener Questionnaire is a tool designed to help identify MLLs/ELs who are potentially SIFE. The questionnaire must be completed with a help from a trusted interpreter that speaks the language of the student/family. It is critical that the family is informed in a language they can understand, that the answers will help inform the most appropriate programming for the student and will not be used against enrollment decision.

### SIFE Pre-Screener Interview Questionnaire

This questionnaire should be conducted after the Home Language Survey (HLS) and ELP Screening has been completed. The questionnaire should be conducted by an MLL/EL teacher or administrator in the students' primary language with an interpreter.

School District		NOTES:
Student's Name		
Student's Date of Birth		
Student's Country of Origin and Language		
Parent/Guardian Contact Information		
Results from the ELP Screening		
Interviewer's Name and Title		
Student's Home/Placement School		
If an interpreter is present Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>		

<sup>2</sup> The items on the screener includes information drawn from Massachusetts Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education Definition and Guidance (2019), and New York State Education Department Guidelines for Educating SIFE (2011).



### PERSONAL AND PRIOR SCHOOLING INFORMATION

- 1) How old are you?
- 2) In what country were you born? (If different) in what country were you raised?
- 3) How old were you when you first started school?
- 4) How many years did you go to school? When does the school year begin/end? Did you ever repeat a grade?
- 5) What language(s) did you and your teacher use in school?
- 6) What was your favorite subject in school? What subject was the most difficult for you?
- 7) Did you always go to school? Were there times you couldn't attend school?
- 8) Have you studied English before arrival? Yes/No If yes, for how many years?
- 9) Did your teacher and school keep record of your grades or classwork? Yes/No

### PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS

(The Math questions are designed *only* for 5th grade and up)

- 1) Ask the student to spell his/her name in his/her first language.
- 2) Ask the student to identify date on a calendar and time on an analog clock.  
  
Comments:
- 3) Have the student look at a world globe/map and find their home country and the capital.  
  
Comments:
- 4)  $3\frac{1}{2} - 2\frac{2}{5} =$       5)  $452 \times 613 =$       6)  $572 + 838 =$



## SIFE Background Inventory

In order to get to know and better support the SIFE, the following inventory can be used by the teachers. The inventory should be conducted in the students' primary language with an interpreter.

### LANGUAGE AND LITERACY PRACTICES

Now, I am going to ask you some questions about your language(s).

1) Do you like to read in your free time?  Yes  No

[If yes] what do you read?  Books  Newspapers  Magazines  Other

[If yes] In which language(s) do you read?  Primary language  English  Other

2) Do you like to write?  Yes  No

[If yes] In which language(s) do you write?  Primary language  English  Other

3) Do you like math?  Yes  No

4) When you talk to your friends outside of school which language(s) do you use?

Primary language  English  Other

5) Do you use:  Computers  Cell phone  Video-games  Other  None of these

6) Do you watch TV?  Yes  No

[If yes] in which language(s)?  Primary language  English  Other

Other interests and future aspirations

1) What do you like to do outside of school?

2) Do you work? If yes, what do you do?

3) What are your plans after you finish school?



## Sample Language and Life Skills Inventory

In addition to the background inventory, the Language and Life Skills Inventory will allow teachers to assess the language and life skills of SIFE and work toward building skills needed.

Skills: Student is able to....	In Progress	Satisfactory	Exceeds expectation
Identify major body parts.			
Name days of the week, months of the year, and seasons.			
Tell weather using weather words-sunny, rainy, snowy, hot, cold.			
Name places around the school and things in the classroom.			
Identify names of coins, paper money and gives change.			
Use basic descriptive words to express feelings.			
Identify basic forms of transportation-bus, car, truck, and airplane.			
Read a map and identify things on a map.			
Follow basic directions.			
Identify important signs.			
Express medical needs---headache, stomachache, temperature, 911 emergency.			
Identify numbers, time, math symbols and complete simple computations.			
Identify occupations and understand expectations of employment in different vocations.			
Talk about family and family members.			
Speak in simple sentences.			
Identify shapes.			
Provide basic identifying information-address, phone number, etc.			
Identify preferences for food and drinks and order food at the restaurant.			
Understand simple punctuation rules, capitalization, and paragraph structure.			
Speak, read, and write simple sentences.			
Ask and answer simple questions (who, what, where, when, why.)			
Put words in alphabetical order.			
Identify sequence and categories.			





## SIFE Achievement Plan (SAP)

A SIFE Achievement Plan (SAP) should be used to monitor the progress of a student’s linguistic and academic progress. Developing the SAP would require assessing a student’s ELP, literacy and numeracy skills, and considering the student’s access to rigorous standards-based curricula. This plan should be created by a qualified professional such as the MLL/EL teacher, the general education classroom teacher, or a trained school administrator. Monitoring should be done at regular intervals i.e. quarterly or every semester.

SIFE Achievement Plan (SAP)	
School District	
School Name:	
Student Name-Surname:	
DOB:	
Country of Origin:	
Language(s) Oral & Written	
Type of Language Assistance Program	
<input type="checkbox"/> Dual Language <input type="checkbox"/> Newcomer <input type="checkbox"/> Sheltered Instruction <input type="checkbox"/> ESL <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	
Educator overseeing the plan	
What are student’s funds of knowledge, social and academic strengths?	
Benchmarks (ELP and Academic)	<b>ACCESS level and year</b> _____ <b>RICAS/ELA/PSAT</b> _____ <b>RICAS Math</b> _____ <b>Science</b> _____
Other Local Assessments and Dates	



ACADEMICS	1ST QUARTER	2ND QUARTER	3RD QUARTER	4TH QUARTER
GPA				
Number of credits required for graduation	<b>English</b> _____ <b>History</b> _____ <b>Math</b> _____ <b>Science</b> _____ <b>PE</b> _____			<b>English</b> _____ <b>History</b> _____ <b>Math</b> _____ <b>Science</b> _____ <b>PE</b> _____
Number of credits acquired				
Subject areas of support needed and details				
NOTES:				

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL	1ST QUARTER	2ND QUARTER	3RD QUARTER	4TH QUARTER
Background inventory completed				
After school sports participation				
After school enrichment				
Family program hosted at school				
Number of absences-unexcused				
Number of absences-excused				
Number of tardies				
Detention/Suspension				
NOTES:				



CHECKPOINTS	1 <sup>st</sup> QUARTER	2 <sup>nd</sup> QUARTER	3 <sup>rd</sup> QUARTER	4 <sup>th</sup> QUARTER
After-school academic support/tutoring				
Communication regarding progress made toward graduation				
Discuss future plans beyond high school				
Participation in school or community extra-curricular activities				
Support with study skills and organization				
NOTES:				



PARENT/GUARDIAN COMMUNICATION	1 <sup>st</sup> QUARTER	2 <sup>nd</sup> QUARTER	3 <sup>rd</sup> QUARTER	4 <sup>th</sup> QUARTER
In-person meeting with parent/guardian				
Phone call				
Home visit				
Communication with agencies that may support the student				
NOTES:				



## Appendix A - TIPS for Administrators of SIFE Programs

STRATEGIES	CHECKLIST	RESOURCES
<p><b><i>Evaluate the previous school records thoroughly and make the appropriate placement for the older SIFE</i></b></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Identify a point person and put in place a protocol for evaluating the transcripts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RI Guide for Evaluating Foreign Transcripts: <a href="https://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Instruction-and-Assessment-World-Class-Standards/Instructional-Resources/Foreign-Transcript-Review/Foreign-Transcripts-Review-Resource-Guide-2-27-2012.pdf">https://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Instruction-and-Assessment-World-Class-Standards/Instructional-Resources/Foreign-Transcript-Review/Foreign-Transcripts-Review-Resource-Guide-2-27-2012.pdf</a></li> <li>IES Evaluating Foreign Transcripts: <a href="https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/infographics/pdf/REL_NW_Finding_the_Right_Starting_Point_Obtaining,_Interpreting_and_Evaluating_International_Transcripts.pdf">https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/infographics/pdf/REL_NW_Finding_the_Right_Starting_Point_Obtaining,_Interpreting_and_Evaluating_International_Transcripts.pdf</a></li> <li>Rhode Island Regulations Governing the Education of English Language Learners - <a href="#">200-RICR-20-30-3</a></li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Establish a supportive and welcoming environment that respond to the immediate social, cultural, and linguistic needs of SIFE</i></b></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Identify a point person at the school that will help the student/family with orientation to the routines and procedures at the school</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Have a Day 1 orientation system in place to ensure that students feel welcome and supported</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Utilize translation/interpretation for families on the first day of school</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Use a buddy system with peers or classmates who can show students around and help them adjust to the daily routines</p>	



<p><b><i>Create collaboration among the ESL teachers and content teachers to support linguistic and academic development</i></b></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Establish common planning/meeting times with content area or grade level teams</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Establish professional learning communities for teachers of SIFE</p>	
<p><b><i>Implement flexible scheduling and additional after-school or Saturday school programs for credit recovery for older SIFE</i></b></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Follow the SIFE achievement plan</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Establish newcomer programs</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Recognize strengths of SIFE’s abilities and experience and build on them</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Provide support and guidance for transitions (5th grade to middle school and 8th grade to high school and beyond.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Short &amp; Boyson (2012) Helping Newcomer Students Succeed <a href="https://www.carnegie.org/media/filer_public/ff/fd/fffda48e-4211-44c5-b4ef-86e8b50929d6/ccny_report_2012_helping.pdf">https://www.carnegie.org/media/filer_public/ff/fd/fffda48e-4211-44c5-b4ef-86e8b50929d6/ccny_report_2012_helping.pdf</a></li></ul>



## Appendix B - TIPS for Teachers of SIFE

STRATEGIES	CHECKLIST	RESOURCES
<p><i>Establish a supportive and welcoming environment that responds to the immediate social, cultural, and linguistic needs of SIFE</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Establish predictable and consistent classroom routines and teach these routines to SIFE at the beginning of the school year</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Use technology for translation support as initial scaffold when possible and necessary</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Use a buddy system with peers or classmates who can show students around and help them adjust to daily schedule</li> </ul>	
<p><i>Activate prior knowledge</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Give discussion questions ahead of time before a lecture/lesson with visuals so students can prepare what they will learn the next day.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide picture about the content area</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Utilize a student's' home country to make connections to what is being taught.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Bring <i>realia</i> to class.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Add visuals to your presentations, not clipart, but real visuals that relate to your topic.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Look for resources that go beyond the textbook and teacher materials such as art, music, storytelling, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategies for activating prior knowledge <a href="https://strategiesforspecialinterventions.weebly.com/activating-prior-knowledge1.html">https://strategiesforspecialinterventions.weebly.com/activating-prior-knowledge1.html</a></li> <li>• Activating prior knowledge with ELs <a href="https://www.edutopia.org/article/activating-prior-knowledge-english-language-learners">https://www.edutopia.org/article/activating-prior-knowledge-english-language-learners</a></li> <li>• News in Levels- adapted news articles for MLLs/ELs <a href="http://www.newsinlevels.com">http://www.newsinlevels.com</a></li> </ul>
<p><i>Organize your classroom to allow for collaboration among students</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide handouts with notes for all students instead of having students take notes in class. Allow students to use notes for class discussions</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Partner students to work on homework with partners/groups</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ways to Get Students to Work Together:</b> <u><a href="#">Center for Applied Linguistics 101 Strategies for Collaboration</a></u> Scroll to the bottom of this web page. Click on the link titled, "The GO TO Strategies: Scaffolding Options for</p>



	<input type="checkbox"/> Place students in groups with speakers of the same language (if applicable) but allow them to work with their Native English-speaking peers as well.	<p>Teachers of English Language Learners, K-12”</p> <p>Once downloaded, open in Adobe, and scroll to Page 25 (all the pages before contain research).</p> <p>From there, all of the strategies are clickable links on the Adobe document. Strategies are leveled 1-5, and appropriate levels for each strategy are indicated by a grey box under the “Levels” subtitle of each strategy.</p>
<p><i>Check for understanding</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Allow students to partner talk, share their own idea and repeat their partner’s idea <input type="checkbox"/> Utilize graphic organizers	<p><b>Printable Graphic Organizers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Jim Burke's "Tools for Thought" Pre-Made Graphic Organizers</u></a></li> <li>• <a href="#"><u>Colorin' Colorado's List of Graphic Organizers for Various Purposes</u></a></li> </ul>
<p><i>Teach both language and content through scaffolding</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Collaborate with the ESL teacher to co-plan <input type="checkbox"/> Create a picture dictionary for key vocabulary <input type="checkbox"/> Create a word wall with key vocabulary, images, a student-friendly definition, and synonyms <input type="checkbox"/> Use video clips and images in presentation instead of lecturing <input type="checkbox"/> Utilize online resources for students to do research in native language. <input type="checkbox"/> Provide language and age appropriate content materials <input type="checkbox"/> Create visuals for the classroom such as timelines, picture walls, anchor charts, etc. so students can visualize the content.	<p><b>Graphic Organizers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elementary Focused: <a href="https://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/"><u>https://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/</u></a></li> <li>• Secondary Focused: <a href="https://www.heinemann.com/shared/onlineresources/E00464/appendix.pdf"><u>https://www.heinemann.com/shared/onlineresources/E00464/appendix.pdf</u></a></li> </ul> <p><b>Provide differentiated texts:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://www.rewordify.com"><u>www.rewordify.com</u></a> - copy and paste difficult text, click on “Rewordify Text” and provide students with an easier-to-read document.</li> <li>• <a href="http://www.newsela.com"><u>www.newsela.com</u></a> - current event articles with adjustable lexile levels (from kindergarten to 12th grade)</li> </ul> <p><b>Resources for Scaffolding Content:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English Learners Success Forum: <a href="https://www.elsuccessforum.org/resources"><u>https://www.elsuccessforum.org/resources</u></a></li> </ul>





		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sample units designed for SIFE <a href="http://teachingrefugees.com/instructional-programming/sample-units/">http://teachingrefugees.com/instructional-programming/sample-units/</a></li><li>• Scaffolding Instruction <a href="https://www.colorincolorado.org/blog/scaffolding-ccss-instruction-ells-new-resource-guides">https://www.colorincolorado.org/blog/scaffolding-ccss-instruction-ells-new-resource-guides</a></li></ul>
<p><i>Use alternative forms of assessment tools</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> The use of portfolio is an excellent way to record SIFE’s progress over time.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Utilize a checklist approach to see what they do know.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Instead of pop-quizzes/tests, have students choose how to demonstrate understanding (PowerPoint, acting out, song, etc.)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Allow students to create a presentation to explain a concept to peers.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fair and Square Assessment for MLLs/ELs <a href="http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/feb16/vol73/num05/Fair-And-Square-Assessments-for-ELLs.aspx">http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/feb16/vol73/num05/Fair-And-Square-Assessments-for-ELLs.aspx</a></li><li>• Non-test alternatives for MLLs/ELs <a href="https://www.fluentu.com/blog/educator-english/assessing-english-language-learners/">https://www.fluentu.com/blog/educator-english/assessing-english-language-learners/</a></li></ul>
<p><i>Advocate for your SIFE</i> <i>“If you ever feel like you’re just one person trying to change something, I promise there are hundreds, thousands, if not millions of people out there who feel the same way as you, who want to make a difference.”---</i> <i>Saira O’Mallie</i></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Advocacy &amp; Leadership for MLLs/ELs <a href="https://www.colorincolorado.org/teaching-ells/role-esl-teachers/advocacy-leadership">https://www.colorincolorado.org/teaching-ells/role-esl-teachers/advocacy-leadership</a></li><li>• MLL/EL Advocacy Guide <a href="https://www.colorincolorado.org/sites/default/files/ELL_AdvocacyGuide2015.pdf">https://www.colorincolorado.org/sites/default/files/ELL_AdvocacyGuide2015.pdf</a></li><li>• Best Practices for Serving English Language Learners and their families <a href="https://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/TT-ELL-Best-Practices-Guide-WEB-v2-Nov2017.pdf">https://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/TT-ELL-Best-Practices-Guide-WEB-v2-Nov2017.pdf</a></li></ul>



## Community Resources for SIFE

### *Local Libraries*

Local libraries often have resources for older SIFE on literacy development. They also offer internet, tutoring, and other community classes that may be supportive.

### *Outreach Centers*

- Family Service of Rhode Island - <https://www.familyserviceri.org/community-resources> provides access to many resources for families in need.
- Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island- <http://diiri.org/> has many services for newcomers including education, employment, resettlement, translation/interpretation, etc.
- Refugee Dream Center- <http://www.refugeedreamcenter.org> offers post-resettlement services for youth and families.
- Americans Helping Others ProspEr (AHOPE)- <http://www.ahoperi.com/> offers mentoring programs for refugees.
- Break Through Providence- <https://breakthroughprovidence.org/> provides programs increase academic opportunity for underserved students.
- English for Action- <http://www.englishforaction.org/> offers participatory English language, childcare, and other educational programs.
- Clínica Esperanza/Hope Clinic- <https://www.aplacetobehealthy.org/> provides free multilingual healthcare for those without healthcare coverage.



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