

A Resource to Support Native Language Coding

The purpose of this resource is to support state coordinators in coding languages spoken by English learners and immigrant children and youth in EDPass, a data portal used by state education agencies to submit data as part of ED Facts.¹ This resource provides information about how to make accurate and informed language coding decisions that adhere to ED Facts reporting requirements for English learner and/or immigrant status.² The resource provides tips and strategies to accurately represent the native languages that are present in the participating student population of your state.

What is a native language?

For the purpose of ED Facts reporting for English learners and immigrant students, we use the term “native language” to specify the language normally used by students or normally used by the parents of the students. Reporting a student’s native language can be based on the language normally used in the home, even if the child speaks English as well.

Part 1: Why is language coding important?

Language coding serves as a valuable metric to ensure representation for all students and their families. Accurate data on the full diversity of languages spoken by students is critical as it contributes to funding, services, and resources provided by the state and local education agencies to better serve English learners, immigrant children and youth, and their families.

Research has shown how parent engagement improves with intentional support from schools to remove barriers for parents such as translating materials and providing translation services (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Tarasawa & Waggoner, 2015; Verna et al., 2012). Parent engagement, in turn, is seen as a protective factor (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017), and leads to student learning and success (Baird, 2015; Epstein, 2002; Wilder, 2014). Accurately coding a student’s native language is an important part of taking an asset-oriented approach to instruction and classroom practices, viewing student’s multilingualism, bilingualism, and heritage literacy as assets to collective student learning (National Academies of Sciences, 2017).

Accurate coding of native languages is also required by law. ESEA section 1111(b)(2)(F) requires states to identify the languages other than English that are present, to a significant extent, in the participating student population of the state. Data errors and miscoding can result in a miscount of student languages.

Accurate language coding helps students and their families by:

- » Ensuring funding and resources to support all students and families
- » Ensuring materials are translated for families
- » Promoting inclusiveness and belonging for all students and families

¹ See The [ED Facts Initiative webpage](#) for more information and the [File-Specifications—ED Facts](#).

² See [ED Facts file specification](#) 141 (DG678) for EL enrolled version 21.0 and 045 (DG519) for Immigrant version 21.0.

Part 2: Strategies to efficiently and accurately document language codes

The following strategies to efficiently and accurately document native language codes have been developed through interviews and feedback from state coordinators. Interviews with state coordinators included representatives from the Title III and Data, Research, and Technology departments or offices at state education agencies. The strategies are accompanied by tips from state coordinators and data specialists.

Strategy A: Create a state-specific list of native languages

Culling through a list of over 500 different languages, in addition to different references and resources, can be difficult, daunting, and time consuming. One strategy is to create your own state-specific list of native languages and update the state-specific list periodically. This state-specific list focuses only on the native languages for your state and can serve as a one-stop document for districts and state offices to use, ensuring consistency, accuracy, and efficiency.

To create your own state-specific list of native languages, here are some suggested steps:

Tips from the field



Create one main file of state-specific native languages. Reviewing several different resources, such as the ISO 639-2 and ISO 639-3 and full list of languages, can be daunting. While it might take upfront time and effort, creating a single file with only native state-specific languages can improve efficiency, accuracy, and collaboration.

Step 1: Start with the full list of language codes

- Use the Language Codes for EDPass.xlsx spreadsheet, available at [EDFacts Community Language Reporting Documents webpage](#).³ This webpage has two files, Identifying improbable language (PDF) and Language Codes for EDPass (xlsx). The spreadsheet has the full list of language codes.

Step 2: Create a clean list that removes ineligible or invalid languages

- Remove languages that are not real-world languages. In the Language Codes for EDPass.xlsx spreadsheet, languages that are not accepted by the EDPass system are marked as “Not used in EDPass.” Reasons for languages not being accepted by the EDPass system includes languages that are obsolete, constructed, liturgical, nearly extinct or less than 100 native speakers of a language, terminology entries, and scholarly.
- Removing ineligible or invalid languages frees up the state coordinator and data specialist to focus only on data quality and accuracy of native languages.

Step 3: Refine the list with state-specific native languages

- Remove languages that have not been used as native languages in your state. To do so, you will need to access your state’s EDFacts data submissions to conduct a crosswalk of all native languages of your state. Use data from the past five years to refine your state-specific list of languages.
- Removing languages that have not been present in your state for the past five years makes the list more manageable. This allows the state coordinator to efficiently and accurately code the native languages.

Strategy A continued on next page.

³ See [EDFacts Community Language Reporting Documents webpage](#) to access the Language Codes for EDPass spreadsheet.

Strategy A: Create a state-specific list of native languages—continued

Step 4: Use alpha codes to efficiently and accurately code native languages

- Include the alpha code for each native language from ISO 639-2.⁴ Alpha codes are the three-letter abbreviation for a language. The alpha code helps district and state staff to efficiently and accurately code native languages.
- Typing in the full names of languages can cause errors in the database with spelling mistakes, capitalization, and other inconsistencies in the data. Using an alpha code helps to minimize these data entry mistakes.

Step 5: Update the state-specific list at least annually

- Keep the state-specific list updated at least annually by conducting a crosswalk of all native languages of your state, adding new languages or removing languages as needed.⁵
- Attend communities of practice sessions to learn from other state coordinators on their native language scenarios or data discrepancies. These scenarios can be used for you to discuss with your state colleagues to keep updating your state-specific list.

Strategy B: Conduct periodic quality control checks

Accurate data in EDPass requires ongoing coordination and collaboration across multiple staff from the state and local education agencies that includes consistent student screenings, data entry and collection, and data quality reviews. Across these data collection procedures, data quality review is an important step to ensure accurate language codes. To minimize data errors and miscoding, periodic data quality reviews help to improve the state data. Steps to conduct periodic data quality reviews include:

Step 1: Check for status

- Identify students who have an English learner and/or immigrant status in your state.⁶ A native language should be reported for all students with an English learner and/or immigrant status.⁷

Step 2: Check for native language

- Refer to your state-specific list of native languages (see strategy A); the ISO 639-2 list of languages; or the list of languages from the Language Codes for EDPass.xlsx spreadsheet.

Strategy B continued on next page.

Tips from the field



Use multiple ways to check for EL status.

Use multiple data sources and data elements to ensure accurate EL status:

- » Grade Levels: Report English learners enrolled in elementary and secondary schools (see data group definition in Section 1.0), regardless of whether the LEA in which they are located received Title III funds. Understand when grade 13 designation should be used (p 8).
- » Title III Consortia reporting
- » Disability status
- » Other files collected on EL students

⁴ See the list of alpha codes from [ISO 639-2 Codes for the Representation of Names of Languages](#).

⁵ See [ISO 639-3 for a list of all known human languages](#).

⁶ See [EDFacts file specification](#) 045 (DG519) for Immigrant status version 21.0 and 141 (DG678) for EL enrolled version 21.0.

⁷ See [Guide to Collecting and Reporting Title III Data](#), available on the [English Language Acquisition State Grants-Title III, Part A Reporting and Performance webpage](#).

Strategy B: Conduct periodic quality control checks—continued

Step 3: Check for accuracy and consistency of the data

- Review language codes that EDPass does not accept for reporting. Check that you did not report a student's language as an improbable language.⁸
- Check if there are two language codes in the ISO 639-2 list. If there are two language codes, only the one listed with "(B)", Bibliographic entry can be coded in EDPass.
- Check for special cases, such as English identified as the student's native language, Sign language or American Sign Language as native language, or Unknown or languages not in the ISO 639-2 list. Refer to the file specifications for guidance on how to report the special cases.⁹

Strategy C: Conduct data reviews throughout the school year

Data quality and data reviews are not a once-and-done endeavor. Rather, it is an ongoing process where you will be reaching out to local education agencies and districts throughout the year for clarification. Expect a back-and-forth process with your state Title III coordinator and the Local Educational Agencies (LEAs)/districts.

To improve data quality of the native languages of students in your state, conduct data reviews from the data you receive from LEAs/districts at least twice per school year to ensure corrections can be made to address discrepancies. This back-and-forth process with the LEAs/districts also allows for district and schools staff to investigate errors and fix them before submission.

These data reviews can include validations on the data during the data submission process from LEA to SEA (i.e., ensuring that a language code has been entered for each student) as well as verification reports to ensure that the LEA/district has reviewed and signed off on the data they have submitted.

Tips from the field

Three's a charm. Collect data three times during the school year in October, March, and June. Not only does this allow for multiple rounds of data quality checks but forms a coordinated and collaborative effort by state coordinators, state Title III coordinators, and district data staff.



Part 3: Want to learn more?

Accurate data, with consistent student screenings, data entry and collection, and data quality reviews, are all not solitary endeavors. It takes a team and a network of colleagues at the state and local education agencies to keep improving language codes.

» Review resources and presentations from the Title III data quality effort

The Title III data quality effort provides a venue for technical assistance, support, and collaboration for SEA Title III and ED Facts Coordinators, to improve the quality of Title III-related data that states submit through ED Facts and their Consolidated State Performance Reports (CSPRs).¹⁰

⁸ See the resource, [Identifying Improbable Languages](#), from the [ED Facts Community Language Reporting Documents webpage](#).

⁹ See [ED Facts file specification](#) 045 (DG519) for Immigrant status version 21.0 and 141 (DG678) for EL enrolled version 21.0 for thorough guidance on special cases.

¹⁰ See resources and webinar presentations on the [English Language Acquisition State Grants-Title III, Part A Reporting and Performance webpage](#).

» Review the guide to collecting and reporting Title III data

The Guide to Collecting and Reporting Title III Data report provides a thorough explanation of coding data. The guide includes examples, resources, and steps for coding FS141 EL Enrolled and FS045 Immigrant Population/Participation.¹¹

» Please send specific questions related to your State’s EDFacts data

Email: EDFacts@ed.gov

» Please send questions related to your State’s CSPR data

Email: CSPR@ed.gov

References

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¹¹ See Guide to Collecting and Reporting Title III Data, available on the [English Language Acquisition State Grants-Title III, Part A Reporting and Performance webpage](#).