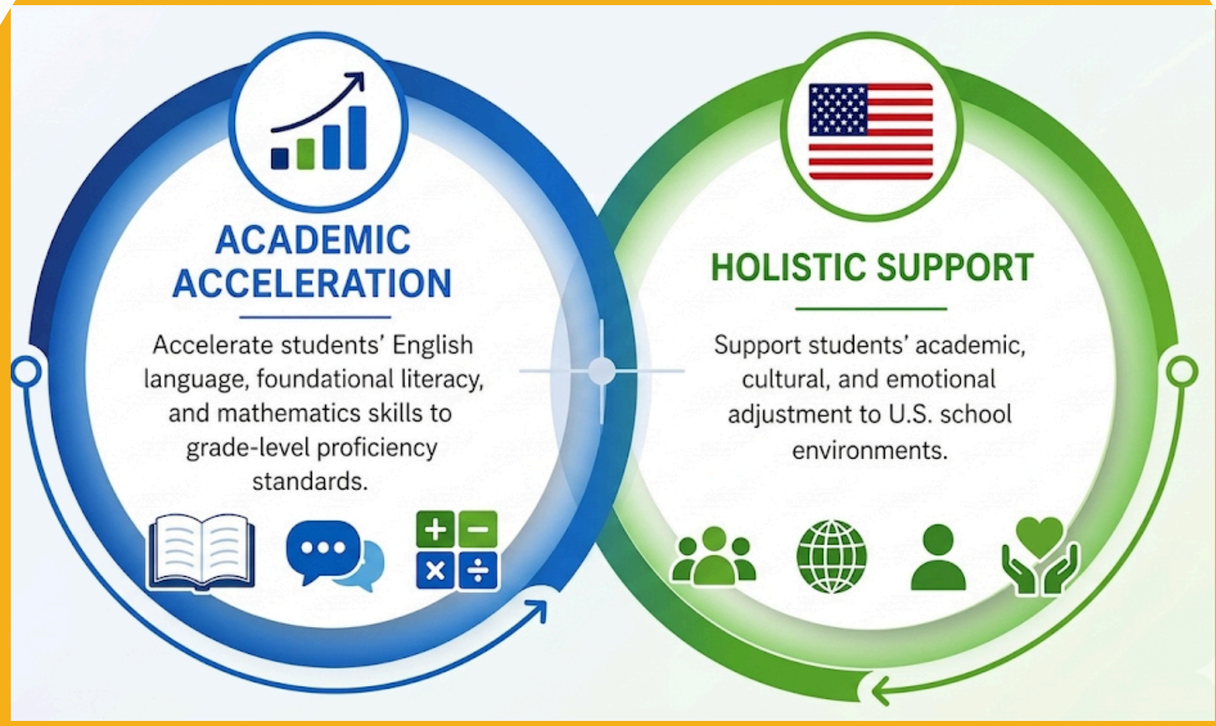
Montgomery County Public Schools
UNLEASHING POTENTIAL

# Evaluation of the Secondary Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) Program 2024–2025: Implementation and Student Growth

**December 2025**

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**Shared Accountability**
Applied Research and Evaluation

# Secondary SLIFE Program

## Status of Implementation and Student Growth

## Executive Summary

### Background and Study Purpose

The Secondary Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) program serves newly arrived middle and high school age emergent multilingual learners (EMLs) with limited or interrupted formal education. Students are identified through a screening process that utilizes the WIDA Screener for English proficiency and several other diagnostic assessments for academic skills, alongside a review of educational documentation. These screenings confirm that students have had less schooling than their U.S. age peers, which limited the development of English language and academic skills needed for grade-level instruction or attainment of expected levels of College and Career Readiness (CCR). Established in 1983–1984 as the Multidisciplinary Educational Training and Support (METS) program, the SLIFE program is designed to provide intensive, targeted instruction aimed at achieving four key objectives: accelerating learning, strengthening foundational academic skills, promoting English language development, and supporting students' adjustment to U.S. schools. In 2024–2025, the Secondary SLIFE program served 290 students across 22 SLIFE sites (10 middle, 12 high schools). Students typically spend 1 to 21 months at these sites before transitioning to their zoned schools to continue mainstream classes and ongoing English Language Development (ELD) services. The study examined program implementation and outcomes, specifically progress in English language and academic skills, and identified areas for improvement.

### Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods design to examine implementation of the Secondary SLIFE program during 2024–2025 and to track academic progress for the 2021–2022 Grade 6 and 9 cohorts through 2024–2025. Implementation data were analyzed from two sources: individual staff surveys and SLIFE-site level surveys. The staff survey (n=187; 65% response rate) captured individual perspectives, while the SLIFE-site survey, completed collaboratively by teams from 21 sites (96% completion), reflected a collective view of site-level implementation Student (n=75, 8%) and family surveys (n=19, 2%) were excluded in the analysis due to low participation rates and incomplete responses. English language growth was measured via the ACCESS for ELLs assessment. For the 2022 Grade 6 cohort, growth in literacy and mathematics was measured by participation and meeting grade-level expectations on the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program assessments (MCAP). For the 2022 Grade 9 cohort, academic growth was tracked through participation in and completion of English 10 and Algebra I, and overall credit toward graduation. Continuity and retention in Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) were examined for each Grade 9 cohort, beginning with the 2021–2022 cohort, using their June 2025 status to describe retention patterns.

### Key Findings

**Program Design and Implementation.** An analysis of site-specific data, staff surveys, and program documents revealed that the core components expected of the Secondary SLIFE program were largely implemented as intended, with minor variations observed across sites. The reported program model consistently featured intensive ELD instruction, reinforced basic literacy and mathematics skills, and active support for student well-being and U.S. school adjustment. The coordination of program delivery relied on the concerted efforts of a multidisciplinary team, including ELD teachers, Resource Teachers, and key support roles such as Counselors, EML Therapeutic Counselors (ETCs), and Parent Community Coordinators (PCCs), who worked with students and families to strengthen connections between the school and the community. Teacher assignments for SLIFE classes varied by level: middle schools prioritized staff with ELD/ESOL credentials collaborating with paraeducators, while high schools emphasized ELD certifications, experience with newcomers, and teamwork. Overall, over 90% of school-based staff working with SLIFE reported holding ELD/ESOL certifications; of these, 20% held dual certifications in ELD and content areas, and 24% of high school staff were also certified in English Language Arts. Staff primarily utilized district-provided instructional materials (e.g., Read 180, Math 180, HMH), supplementing them with teacher-created resources.

# Secondary SLIFE Program

## Status of Implementation and Student Growth

## Executive Summary

### Key Findings Continued

**Progress Monitoring:** Schools used a variety of strategies to track student progress and assess readiness for transitioning from the SLIFE program to general education. Decisions about program exits were primarily based on teacher judgment, formative assessments, MAP scores, and student behavior, with minimal reliance on state-level assessments and no reported use of resources embedded in the HMH materials.

**Perception of Adequacy of Resources and Supports for Students:** A majority of staff who responded to the survey indicated that a number of resources and supports within the Secondary SLIFE program were insufficient for effective teaching and learning. The majority rated supplemental academic support (70.6%), professional learning (62.8%), school- and district-level guidelines (62.2% and 62.0%), resources for compacted or accelerated learning (67.5%), and attendance supports (65.9%) as insufficient. On the other hand, the majority of staff reported that access to technology (80.4%) and transportation (69.3%) were adequate.

### Factors Affecting Implementation

**Successful Aspects.** The SLIFE site-level and staff surveys highlighted many successful aspects of the Secondary SLIFE program, focusing on staff commitment, evidence of student progress, and the instructional adaptations they made. Small, skill-based, and sheltered classes, supported through co-teaching models, enabled focused instruction in literacy, mathematics, and English language development. Teachers were consistently described as phenomenal for their collaboration, empathy, and persistence, creating safe and inclusive learning environments that fostered belonging and motivation. Staff conveyed that they had observed evident progress among their students—including improved literacy and mathematics skills, stronger attendance, and greater engagement in school life. They also reported adapting resources and refining instruction by expanding effective strategies such as phonics interventions, visuals, modeling, and adaptive technology and instructional resources (e.g., IXL, HMH, Math 180) to personalize instruction and accelerate learning.

**Challenges to Implementation.** The surveys also identified many challenges hindering effective program implementation, most of which reflected the tension between student readiness for standards-based instruction and curricular demands. Staff elaborated that students entered with limited literacy and interrupted schooling, making it challenging to meet grade-level expectations. Frequent absences, staggered enrollment, placement in content-level courses before students are ready, and rapid pacing in content areas hindered sustained progress in English language development and academic skills. Additionally, the lack of a curriculum aligned with the needs of SLIFE, along with age-appropriate and pre-literacy materials, constrained instruction. Notably, the SLIFE program duration was reported to be insufficient to prepare students to transition to grade-level classes with peers. Additionally, the misconception that exiting the SLIFE program eliminates the need for intensive and targeted academic support, along with the limited structures for monitoring students' progress, limit the continuity of support in mainstream settings.

### Demographic Characteristics

Enrollment in the Secondary SLIFE program fluctuated from 624 students in 2023 to 290 in 2025, across 10 middle schools and 12 high schools, with two-thirds at the high school level. Over this period, 1,089 unique students were documented in MCPS records as having experienced interrupted schooling. The majority of the students were identified as Hispanic/Latino (91.7%), received Free and Reduced-price Meals System (FARMS) services (87.2%), and reported their home language as Spanish (86.5%).

# Secondary SLIFE Program

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**Student Growth and Academic Progress**

- **English language proficiency (ELP).** Among students tracked from 2022–2025, of those whose initial 2022 level was ELP1 (Entering) (N = 98), 30.0% progressed to ELP2 (Emerging) and 19.9% progressed to ELP3 (Developing). Among those whose initial 2022 level was ELP2 (Emerging) (N = 85), 43.1% advanced to ELP3 (Developing) and 9.8% advanced to ELP4 (Expanding). This is consistent with research indicating that older EMLs with interrupted schooling often require extended time to achieve proficiency (WIDA, 2023; Gándara & Rumberger, 2009).
- **Progress in Mathematics and Literacy Skills in Middle School: 2022 Grade 6 Cohort.** The 2022 Grade 6 cohort ($N=41$) was tracked across Grades 6–8 using the MCAP (state assessment), MAP-R (Reading), and MAP-M (Mathematics) assessments. Across the Grade 6–8 testing years, the majority (60%–88%) consistently scored at Level 1 (Beginning Learner) on the MCAP. While the MAP results did indicate year-to-year growth, average scores for the cohort remained below the district benchmarks for grade-level proficiency.
- **Progress in Mathematics, Literacy, and Graduation Requirements in High School:** The 2022 Grade 9 cohort (N= 146; projected Grade 12 in 2025) had earned an average of 17.1 credits and a median of 19.5 toward the 22 required for graduation, showing progress in credit-bearing courses. By 2025, one-half (50.7%) had met the CCR requirement for English 10, and 13% for Algebra I.
- **Continuity and Retention in MCPS.** Data showed that Grade 9 cohorts (2022–2025) demonstrated varying continuity through June 2025. Among the earliest cohort, the Class of 2025 (N=216), one third (36.6%) completed high school and graduated, 22.2% remained enrolled, and 41.2% had left MCPS before completing high school. In subsequent cohorts, retention rates varied: 41.4% of the Class of 2026 (N=175), 61.6% of the Class of 2027 (N=151), and 94.0% of the Class of 2028 (N=100) remained enrolled. The reasons for withdrawing from MCPS reflected disengagement (62.0% lost contact, 27.3% lacked motivation), with most departures occurring in Grades 9 or 10 (20–40%), highlighting the Grades 9 and 10 as critical for retention for high school age students.

**Conclusion and Suggested Improvements**

The data generated by this study, in aggregate, show that MCPS demonstrates a strong commitment to supporting EMLs with interrupted formal education through staffing, scheduling, and student support. The findings also highlight a need to strengthen instructional programming. To maximize student success and retention, four areas for improvement were identified within a redesigned instructional model focused on accelerated learning and bridging the gaps in academic skills relative to grade-level expectations. The proposed changes include: adopting research-based curricula specifically designed for the literacy and mathematical needs of older EMLs with interrupted schooling; integrating a permanent 'interrupted schooling' indicator into the student information system, allowing for precise tracking of enrollment trends, academic progress, and long-term outcomes; and deepening staff capacity through specialized professional development designed to improve instructional delivery, increase student retention, and facilitate their long-term academic success during and after the program.

# Evaluation Framework

# CONTINUE IMPLEMENTATION

The Secondary Students with Interrupted Education (SLIFE) Program is a vital accelerator designed to meet the profoundly unique needs of a specific group of Emerging Multilingual Learners (EMLs). From intake screening tests, these students are identified as having limited English proficiency and a schooling gap of at least two consecutive years of formal education compared to U.S. peers. Additional diagnostic assessments also indicate that their literacy and numeracy skills are approximately two or more years behind typical age-level expectations. These learning profiles often reflect life experiences such as migration or displacement. Therefore, the SLIFE program serves as their essential entry point into the U.S. school system by providing focused, intensive support to build foundational literacy, core mathematics skills, and English fluency simultaneously. Additionally, the program offers resources to help students adjust to the academic and social demands that follow trauma, displacement, or the broader challenges of adapting to a new culture.

Without this specialized, comprehensive intervention, these students face severe risks: they are more likely to struggle academically, disengage from school, fail to earn credits, and miss the crucial milestones necessary for high school graduation and postsecondary success, directly undermining the goals of MCPS's strategic plan, *Future Ready: 2025–2030 Strategic Plan.* Initiatives like the SLIFE program align with the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future*, which calls for school districts to provide additional resources for students with disabilities, emergent multilingual learners, and other groups.

Therefore, maintaining and strengthening the Secondary SLIFE program while clarifying that it is an accelerated, transitional pathway for EMLs with interrupted schooling is essential. The program is designed to help students adjust to U.S. schools and MCPS, stay engaged, and achieve their full academic and social potential. In doing so, the program advances both individual success and district-wide goals of academic excellence and equity.

# Background

**Program History in MCPS.** MCPS established the METS program in 1983–1984, the precursor to the SLIFE program after staff observed that some students entered school with very limited access or inconsistent opportunities for formal schooling, often due to war, civil unrest, migration, poverty, in their home countries. Since 2022, the program has been known as the Secondary SLIFE program, although some historical records continue to reference "METS."

The SLIFE program is a component of the broader English Language Development (ELD) initiative. Housed within the Division of Multilingual Education (DME), the program provides short-term, sheltered, and intensive interventions to accelerate English language development (ELD) and build skills in literacy, mathematics, and other content areas. The goal is to help them catch up academically and access grade-level content alongside their peers, enabling students to transition into non-SLIFE classes within two years. In the 2024–2025 school year, the program operated in 22 schools (10 middle, 12 high). The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) requires reporting on SLIFE students within the multilingual learner population (MSDE, 2022, 2025a), and the Blueprint for Maryland's Future mandates targeted programs to ensure equitable access and success for this group (MSDE, 2022).

SLIFE in middle and high school face distinct challenges due to the limited time available to recover missed schooling while meeting high school graduation requirements. These include low native-language literacy, gaps in foundational academic knowledge, limited familiarity with U.S. school culture, and socio-emotional needs stemming from trauma or isolation. Furthermore, older students often assume adult responsibilities like employment or family caregiving, which can further impact their school engagement.

**Identification and Placement**. Students may be referred to the SLIFE program by the International Admissions and Enrollment (IAE) office, school staff, or family members. Eligibility requires that students: (1) score Level 1 or 2 on the WIDA Screener Placement Test, (2) a schooling gap of at least two consecutive years of formal education, 3) function at least two years below grade level in mathematics and/or literacy (commonly measured by FAST™ Math and BRIGANCE® Reading), and (4) be age-appropriate for at least Grade 6 placement (MCPS, 2025).

Students designated as SLIFE are assigned to a specialized secondary SLIFE site at a middle or high school based on their age. The assigned site may be located at a different school from the student's home school, which is determined by their residential address. Upon enrollment, students begin a focused course of study at the SLIFE site for either 1–10 months or up to 21 months, depending on the track determined during screening. If needed, placement may be extended with Department of Multilingual Education (DME) approval. While in the program, students are expected to engage with grade-level curricula, receive intensive ELD support, and address academic gaps. After the SLIFE program, students transition to non-SLIFE classes while continuing to receive ELD services until they meet the Maryland English proficiency targets, as measured by WIDA ACCESS for Multilingual Learners (MLLs) (MSDE, 2025; MCPS, 2025b). Participation in the SLIFE program or ELD services is optional, allowing families to opt out of services or decline placement.

**Alignment with the Strategic Plan.** The Secondary SLIFE program supports two goals of the *Future Ready: 2025–2030 Strategic Plan* (MCPS, 2025a): Goal 1: Academic Excellence (Objectives 2, 4, 6), promoting student academic growth, and Goal 2: Positive, Safe, and Effective Learning Environments (Objective 6), fostering supportive learning conditions.

# Program Description

## Overview

The goal of the Secondary SLIFE program is to provide an intensive, intervention to accelerate learning and prepare students for successful transition into general education settings for up to 21 months. The program is designed to address learning gaps in literacy and mathematics while providing a supportive environment that meets students' immediate social, cultural, and linguistic needs. Upon exiting the program, students are expected to:

- Adjust successfully to the academic and social environment of U.S. schools;
- Have made measurable progress in English language proficiency, literacy, and numeracy;
- Demonstrate readiness for grade-level, content-area instruction; and
- Transition to non-SLIFE classes at their home school

## Program Goals

- **Academic Acceleration:** Accelerate students' English language, foundational literacy, and mathematics skills to grade-level proficiency standards.
- **Holistic Support**: Support students' academic, cultural, and emotional adjustment to U.S. school environments.
- **Successful Transition:** Prepare students for a successful transition into non-SLIFE classes at their home schools within 20 academic months, where they will continue to receive ELD services.

*Placement is determined based on screening data, with students assigned to either a 1 to 10 months track or an 11 to 20 months track.

## Program Components

- **Enrollment and Wraparound Case Management:** Upon enrollment, families receive case management support from IAE navigators, along with an orientation, supplies, and resources from their METS Intake Specialist. Each student meets with an ETC for a mental health screening, which allows IAE to notify the school of any mental health concerns or refer the student to therapy with community partners in more severe cases.
- **Intensive English Language Development (ELD):** Daily instruction by certified ELD teachers to build foundational English skills and accelerate English language acquisition.
- **Accelerated Literacy Development:** Targeted literacy interventions include SLIFE Literacy Courses in middle school and Read 180 in high school, designed to strengthen reading abilities and close learning gaps.
- **Accelerated Mathematics Development:** Mathematics interventions provide essential instruction through SLIFE Math—Mathematical Applications and Concepts in middle school and Math 180 in high school—emphasizing both numeracy skills and the language of mathematics.
- **Mainstreaming Opportunities:** Students participate in selected general education classes (e.g., health, physical education, and art) alongside non-SLIFE peers to promote academic integration and social engagement.
- **Socio-emotional, Acculturation, and Well-being Supports:** Counselors, EML Therapeutic Counselors (ETC), and Parent Community Coordinators (PCC) provide continuous support to help students and families adjust culturally to U.S. schools, strengthen school–family connections, and foster overall well-being.
- **Small Class Sizes and Instructional Support:** Classes are maintained at a 15:1 ratio to accommodate the multi-grade structure and varied learning needs. A dedicated SLIFE paraeducator provides additional instructional support, and native language assistance is offered whenever possible.

# Cost Structure

Costs Related to the Secondary SLIFE Program for the 2024–2025 Academic Year

| Category | Description | FY 2025 Costs |
|---|---|---|
| **Staff** | International Admissions and Enrollment (IAE) and Central Office Staff supporting SLIFE students, including Instructional Specialist, Intake Specialist, and 8.9 Emergent Multilingual Learners (EML) Therapeutic Counselors | $1,186,757 |
| **Professional Development Training (Teachers)** | Circle Keeper/Girasol Summer Training: 2 days, Tier 1 pay, 28 teachers | $9,408 |
| | Circle Keeper/Girasol Fall Training: 2 days, stipend, 35 teachers | $5,250 |
| **Instructional Materials** | Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH) curriculum/licenses | $79,352 |
| **Total Program Costs** | | **$1,280,767** |

# Evaluation Scope

## Background

This evaluation had two primary objectives: to examine the implementation of the Secondary SLIFE program and to analyze the academic growth of its students. Using a mixed-methods design, the study examined program implementation during the 2024–2025 academic year and student progress in two SLIFE cohorts—2022 Grade 6 and Grade 9—over the period from 2022 to 2025. Student growth was analyzed in English language proficiency, literacy, mathematics, and high school credit accumulation. This evaluation includes only middle and high school students and does not include information related to students at the elementary level.

## Purpose of Evaluation

Examine how the Secondary SLIFE program is implemented across middle and high school settings.

Describe student growth in English language proficiency, literacy, and mathematics, along with progress toward graduation through high school credit accumulation.

Identify changes needed to strengthen program effectiveness.

## Evaluation Questions

1. To what extent was the Secondary SLIFE program implemented as designed across middle and high school settings?
   - How was the instructional program for SLIFE planned and coordinated at the school, department, and district levels?
   - What resources, instructional tools, and progress monitoring practices were used at SLIFE sites to support student learning?
2. What contextual factors facilitated or hindered effective implementation of the program?
3. What were the demographic characteristics of middle and high school students identified as SLIFE from 2022 to 2025?
4. To what extent did students demonstrate growth in English language proficiency, as measured by ACCESS for MLLs?
5. To what extent did the students in the 2022 Grade 6 and Grade 9 cohorts demonstrate gains in mathematics and literacy skills?
   - Grade 9 Cohort (2022): Participation and performance in English 10 and Algebra I, and progress toward high school graduation through accumulation of required credits.
   - Grade 6 Cohort (2022): Participation in MAP and MCAP assessments, and meeting middle school grade-level proficiency benchmarks.

# Methodology

## Implementation

To address Evaluation Questions 1 and 2, four role-specific surveys were administered between April 10 and May 30, 2025: SLIFE-site, staff, student, and parent/guardian surveys. These surveys collected feedback on program implementation, experiences, and areas for improvement, with the staff survey capturing individual perspectives and the SLIFE site-level survey reflecting a collective view of site-level implementation. Participation was maximized through an extended survey window and reminder notices. A comprehensive document review, including internal memos, MCPS and EML handbooks, state guidelines, assessment frameworks, and relevant SLIFE research, was also conducted.

## Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

**SLIFE Site Survey:** An online survey was sent to the ELD middle school content specialist or high school resource teacher at each SLIFE school, with instructions to complete the survey collaboratively with other staff involved in the program. The survey was designed to capture a comprehensive overview of program planning, coordination, staffing, successful practices, and challenges at each site.

- **Staff Survey:** An online survey was distributed via Email to all staff supporting the Secondary SLIFE program, including instructional staff, ELD teachers, resource counselors, content specialists, parent community coordinators (PCCS), transition counselors, and any personnel in DME and IAE with responsibilities related to the SLIFE program.
- **Student Survey:** Any middle and high school students identified for the SLIFE program at enrollment received a survey via their MCPS Google accounts. The survey was designed to capture their perceptions and experiences in the program. A Spanish-language version was available, and 37% (n=28) of respondents used it.
- **Family Survey**: Parents and guardians of students identified for the SLIFE program, for whom MCPS had current contact information, were invited via ParentSquare to complete an online survey about their child's transition into MCPS and experiences with the SLIFE program. A Spanish-language version was available and completed by 42% (8 of 19) of respondents.

***Note.*** Student and family survey data were not analyzed because response rates were low and many submissions were incomplete; therefore, the data would not provide a representative or reliable reflection of participant experiences.

## Survey Samples and Response Rates

| Group | Invited (N) | Responded (n) | Response Rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Middle school SLIFE sites | 10 | 10 | 100 |
| High school SLIFE sites | 12 | 11 | 92.0 |
| Staff: School-based | 227 | 138 | 60.8 |
| Staff: Central Office | 44 | 38 | 86.4 |
| Parents/Guardians | 749 | 19 | 3.0 |
| Students | 849 | 75 | 8.8 |

- Approaches to the analysis of the survey data examined details related to program implementation, successes, challenges, and areas needing improvement. The closed-ended survey items were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Additionally, open-ended responses were reviewed, summarized, and organized by themes to identify recurring patterns (themes were reported if supported by responses from 5 or more sites or 10 or more staff respondents, respectively).
- Student records, collated from multiple files, along with internal memos, handbooks, state guidelines, assessment frameworks, and comparable district materials, were reviewed to guide interpretation of survey findings and assess alignment with evidence-based practices and recommended SLIFE program components.

# Methodology

# Outcomes

To address evaluation questions 3, 4, and 5, the study used a longitudinal, cohort-based design using multiple administrative data sources, including student information systems, EML files, enrollment records, state assessments, and report cards. This approach captured year-to-year program participation, program size, and the total number of students served from 2022 to 2025. Student growth in English language skills was assessed using consecutive English Language Proficiency Assessments (ELPA), the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners (ACCESS) for Multilingual Learners (MLLs) (MSDE, 2025). Academic progress for the 2022 Grade 6 cohort was examined in literacy and mathematics. For the 2022 Grade 9 cohort, progress was reviewed in English 10, Algebra I, and other credit-bearing courses. End-of-2025 status served as a proxy for continuity and retention. Retention in MCPS was specifically monitored for Grade 9 cohorts (2022–2025), documenting whether students remained enrolled or had exited by the end of the 2025 school year.

## Data & Measures, & Analysis Procedures

- **Cumulative Program Enrollment**: Any student (N = 1,089) appearing in any records coded as SLIFE at any time from 2022–2025 while enrolled at the middle or high school level.
- **Annual Program Size:** School-year-specific counts of students with interrupted schooling based on the October 15 records.
- **Growth in English Language Proficiency (ELP) Levels**: Derived from the annual ELPA, classifying students into six proficiency levels—Entering, Emerging, Developing, Expanding, Bridging, and Reaching—to monitor English language development over time.
- **Continuity and Retention in MCPS**: Status of Grade 9 cohorts (2022–2025) by June 2025: Still Enrolled, Completed, Withdrawn/Transferred, or Exited.
- **Academic Growth for 2022 Grade 6 and 9 Cohorts:** Identifies students from the 2022 Grade 6 and Grade 9 cohorts who were continuously enrolled through 2025, establishing a stable longitudinal cohort for analyzing academic growth and progression on:.
  a. **Literacy and mathematics proficiency rates** (using MAP and MCAP aligned to state thresholds).
  b. **Participation in and rates for meeting the graduation requirements for English 10 and Algebra I** (score ≥3); Total Credits Earned.

***Note.*** The MSDE identifies the assessment for Multilingual Learners (MLLs) as ACCESS for MLLs, a term that is used interchangeably with ACCESS for English Language Learners (ELLs) in this report.

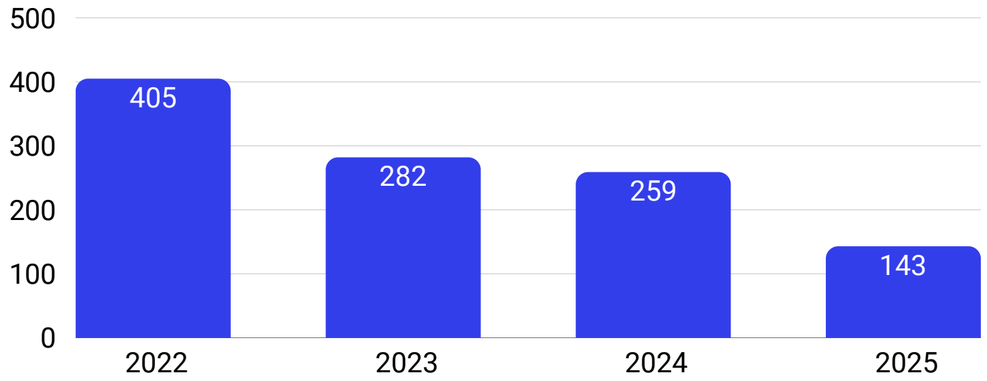
Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) were used, with different samples selected according to the question being addressed.

- **Program reach**: Frequencies and percentages for: 1) cumulative distinct students (N=1,089); 2) yearly enrollment counts; and student characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, special services).
- **Continuity and retention**: Frequencies and percentages for the final 2025 status of Grade 9 cohorts (Still Enrolled, Completed, Withdrawn/Transferred, or Exited).
- **ELP Growth**: percentages) tracking student movement across the six ELPA (ACCESS) proficiency levels.
- **Academic progress for 2022 Grade 6 and 9 cohorts:**
  - Grades 6–8: Performance levels rates (percentages) in literacy and mathematics (MAP/MCAP) aligned to state benchmarks.
  - Grade 9: Number taking and meeting requirements (score ≥3) in English 10 and Algebra I, and total credits earned as indicators of taking and passing credit-bearing courses.

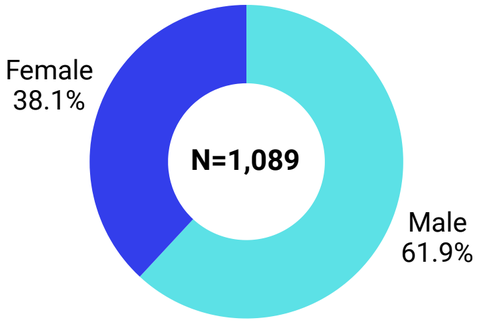
# Characteristics of SLIFE in MCPS

## Yearly Enrollment and Demographic Profile

### SLIFE Yearly Enrollment for 2022 Through 2025 (N=1,089)

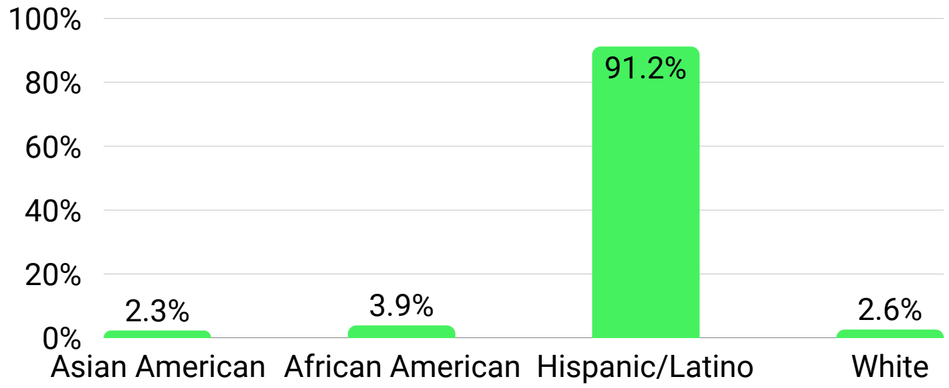


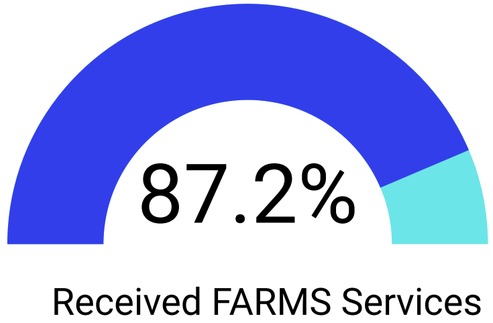

### Gender




*Note:** The counts are unduplicated and reflect the calendar year in which students first enrolled in MCPS and SLIFE. Students might have joined at any time during the school year.

### Race/Ethnicity and Service Receipt Among Secondary SLIFE (N=1,089)




**Note.** This data are addressing evaluation question 3--*What were the demographic characteristics of middle and high school students identified as SLIFE from 2022 to 2025?*

## Findings

Between 2022 and 2025, a total of 1,089 distinct students in grades 6–12 were identified as having interrupted schooling and enrolled in SLIFE, based on multiple MCPS data sources. Program placements typically ranged from 1–10 months for the one-year track and 11–21 months for the two-year track. Students could enroll in MCPS at any point during the school year. Therefore, two reporting metrics are used: Yearly enrollment totals reflect participation within a single year. The cumulative figure of 1,089, however, provides the unduplicated count of all unique students who participated between 2022 and 2025.

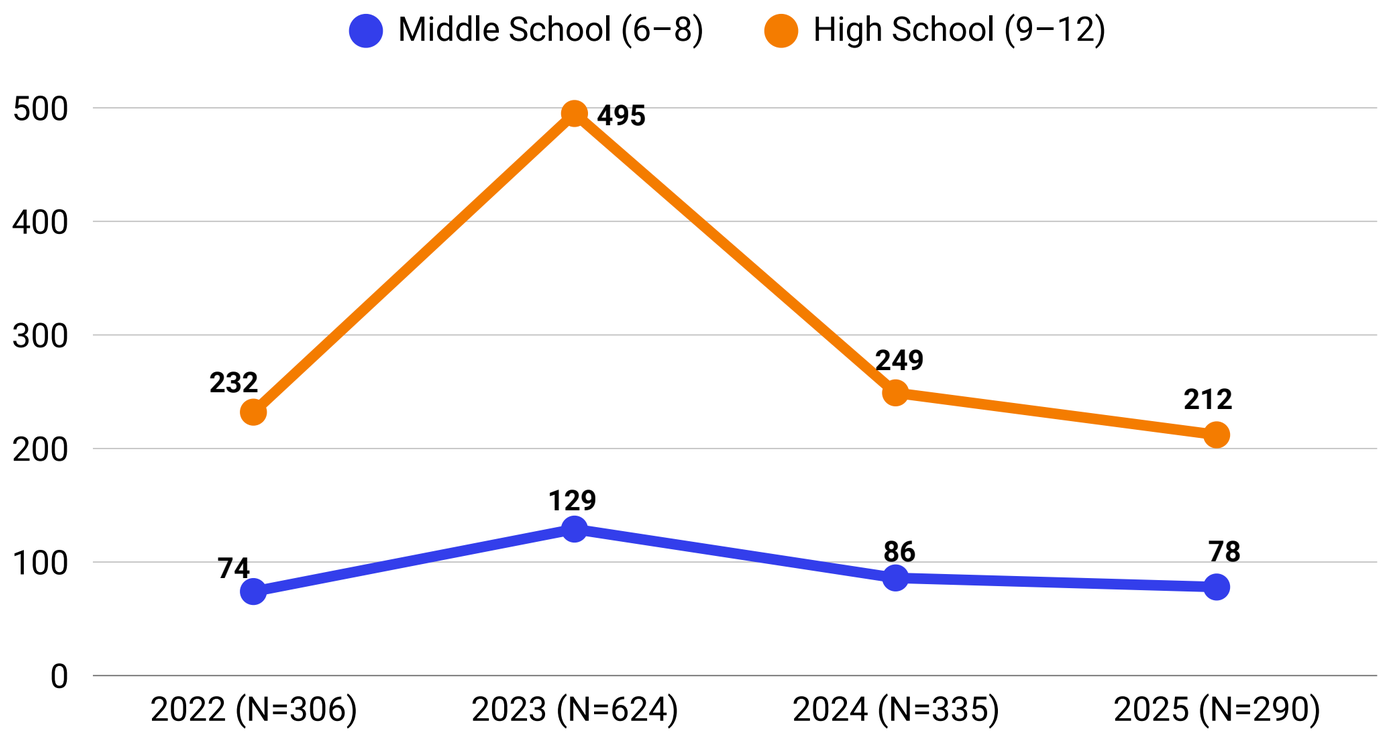
Of these, 405 students were identified as enrolled in SLIFE at the middle or high school level in 2022, with 282 recorded in 2023, 259 in 2024, and 143 in 2025.

The majority of students were identified as Hispanic/Latino (91.2%) and male (61.9%). The vast majority (87.2%) participated in Free and Reduced-Price Meals (FARMS) services.

On student records, Spanish was the primary home language for 86.5% of students, followed by English (4.8%). The remaining 8.7% reported a range of other home languages, including Persian/Dari, Amharic, French, Portuguese, and Vietnamese.

# Program Size 2022 Through 2025

## Program Enrollment Trends by School Level and Academic Year




***Note:**** The total count for each year is based on the snapshot taken in October of the school year. This snapshot only includes students classified as SLIFE at that specific time.

**Distribution of Students by School (2024–2025*)**

| School (MS) N=78 | n | School (High) N=211 | n |
|---|---|---|---|
| Eastern | 14 | Northwood | 37 |
| A. Mario Loiederman | 12 | Montgomery Blair | 26 |
| Neelsville | 11 | Gaithersburg | 25 |
| Sligo | 11 | Wheaton | 25 |
| Gaithersburg | 10 | Springbrook | 23 |
| White Oak | 10 | Watkins Mill | 16 |
| Earle B. Wood | 3 | Bethesda-Chevy Chase | 12 |
| Takoma Park | 3 | Seneca Valley | 12 |
| Francis Scott Key | 2 | Albert Einstein | 9 |
| Julius West | 1 | Quince Orchard | 9 |
| Montgomery Village | 1 | Richard Montgomery | 8 |
| | | Rockville | 5 |
| | | Other schools** (n=3) | 5 |

***Source.*** October 15, 2025, Official File to MSDE; ** 5 students in three non-SLIFE sites.

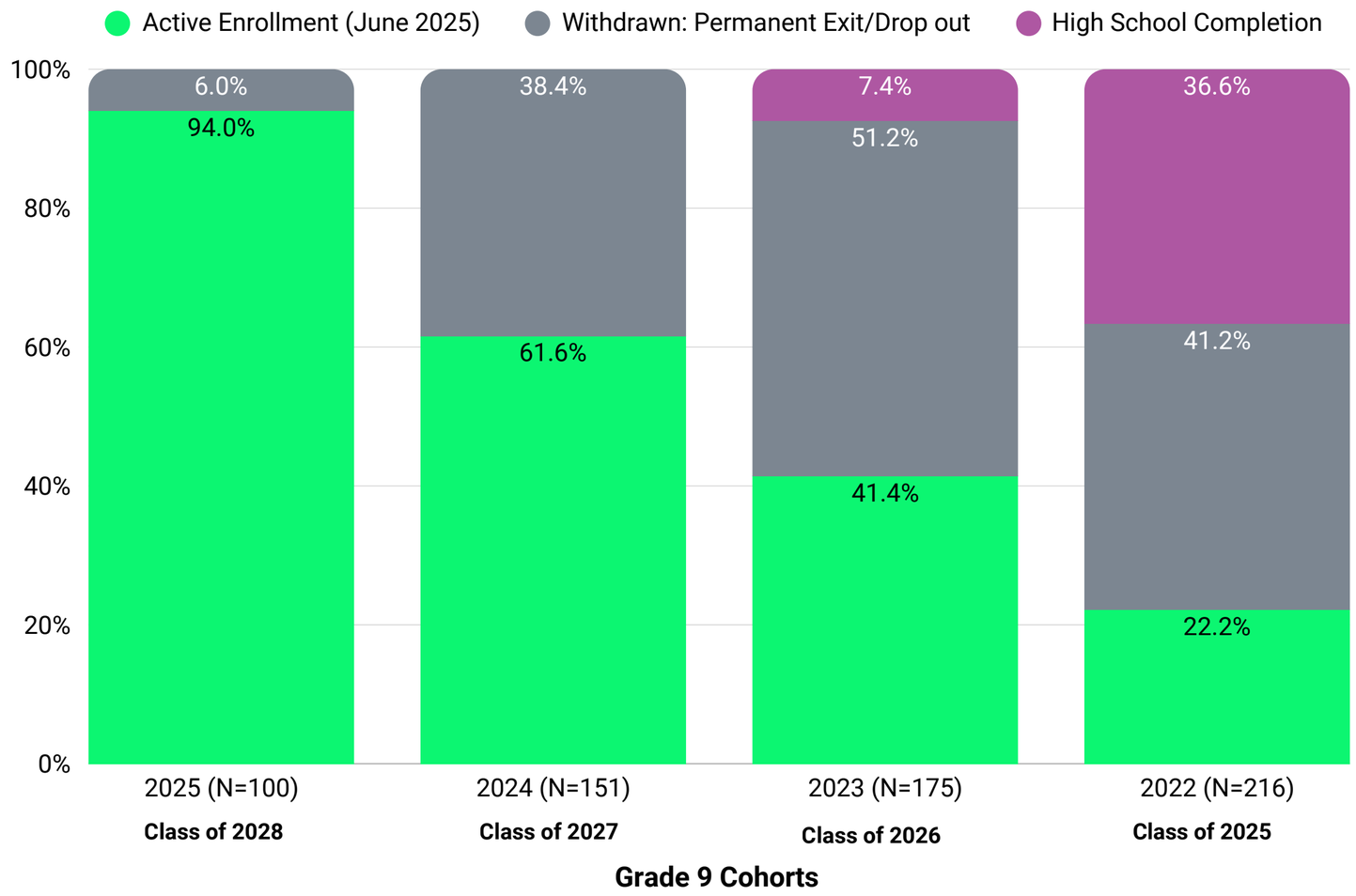
## Findings

From 2022 to 2025, based on the October 15 official EML data submitted to MSDE, the number of students with interrupted schooling ranged from 290 in 2025 to a high of 624 in 2023, at the middle and high school levels. Students were enrolled in either the 1–10 month or 11–21 month track, so depending on the month they join MCPS, some remained classified in student records as SLIFE, across multiple school years. As a result, annual totals may include the same students, with year-to-year changes reflecting new students, program completions, or transitions out of SLIFE. In the 2024–2025 academic year, students with interrupted schooling were distributed across 11 middle schools and 15 high schools, three of which were not designated SLIFE sites. Site-level enrollment ranged from 1 to 14 students in middle school and from 5 to 37 in high school SLIFE sites.

# Continuity in MCPS

## Retention of Grade 9 Cohorts (2022 to 2025)

### Status as of June 2025: Grade 9 Cohorts




**Note.** This analysis only includes students whose first-ever enrollment in MCPS was the year indicated (e.g., the 2022 cohort only contains Grade 9 students who started MCPS in 2022). Students in Grade 9 with any prior enrollment were excluded to ensure a "true starting cohort" for longitudinal analysis.

**Between 2022 and 2025, 1,089 students participated in the SLIFE program; of these, 418 (38.4%) were withdrawn and 28 (2.6%) transferred before completing high school, as defined by the MSDE Attendance Data Collection Manual (2025).

## Findings

These analyses for Grade 9 cohorts** were conducted to examine the continuity and retention of students from the 2022 to 2025 Grade 9 cohorts, following them through June 2025 and tracking their enrollment, withdrawal/dropout, and high school completion rates. Across the 22 to 2025 Grade 9 cohorts, the number of students who left MCPS ranged from 6 in 2025 to 89 students.

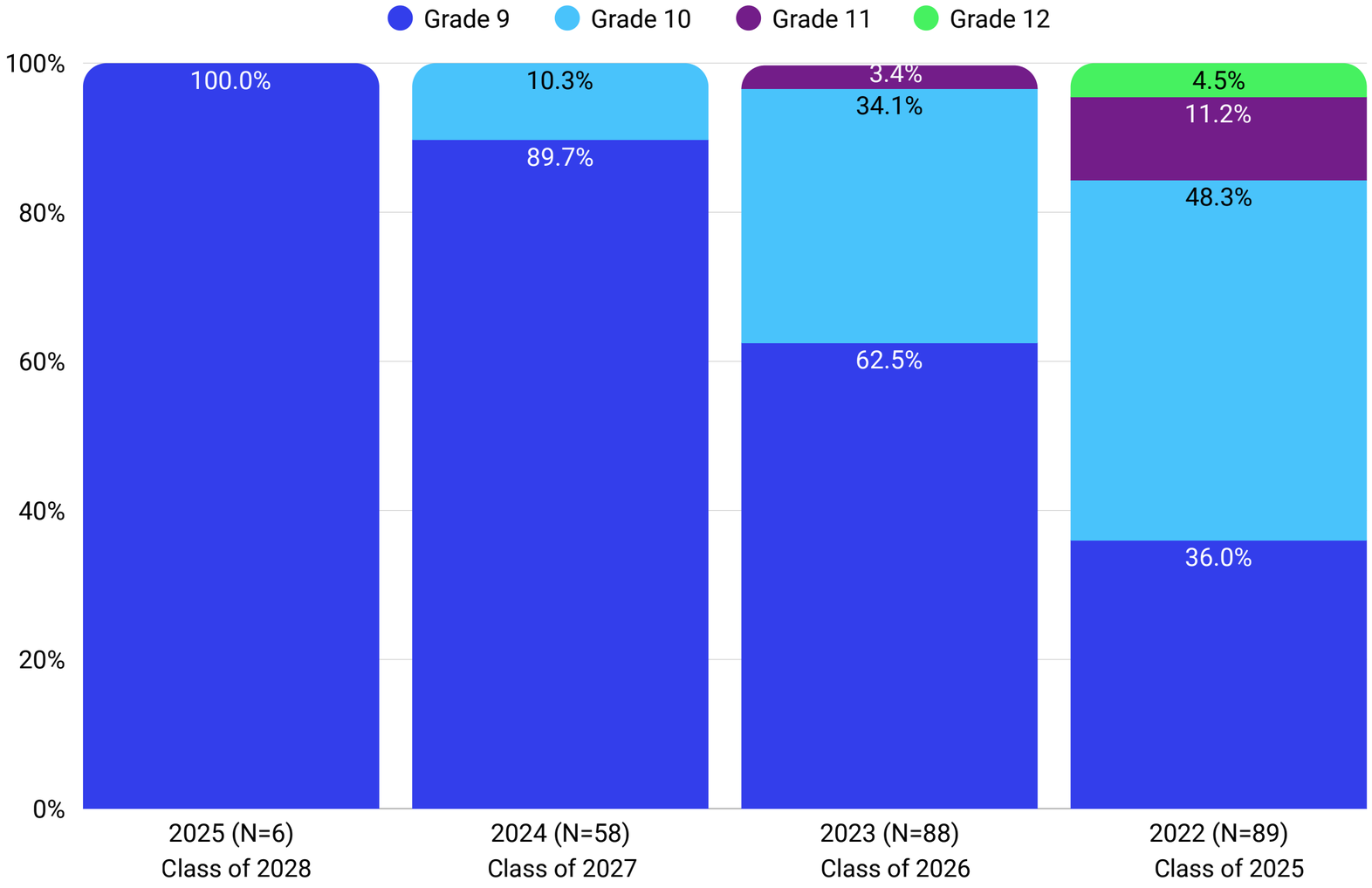
Nearly all students (94.0%) in the Class of 2028 (first year in MCPS: 2025; N=100) remained enrolled at the end of the 2025 school year, with 6.0% recorded as permanent exits and no high school completions. Among the Class of 2027 cohort (entered 2024; N= 151), the majority (61.6%) were actively enrolled, 38.4% had permanently exited, and there were no high school completions. For the Class of 2026 cohort (entered 2023; N= 175), 41.4% remained enrolled, about one-half (51.2%) had permanently exited MCPS, and 7.4% had graduated/completed high school.

The records for the earliest cohort, the Class of 2025 (entered 2022; N=216), showed that a third (36.6%) had completed high school, graduating with a diploma and/or certificate of merit; 41.2% had withdrawn or permanently exited; and 22.2% remained actively enrolled.

# Timing and Grade of Departures

## Last Grade on Record Before Withdrawals from MCPS by Cohort

**Percentage of Students Leaving MCPS at Specific Grade Levels Before Completing High School**




**Grade 9 Cohorts: Students Who Left MCPS**

## Findings

This section focuses on students who withdrew or transferred out of MCPS before graduating from high school. Note. External transfers accounted for 2.0 to 2.5 percent or less of those who left MCPS before completing high school, in any given year. The analysis examines when these students exited the district and how patterns of attrition varied across cohorts. It highlights both the scale and timing of departures, illustrating when students are most likely to leave and how these patterns differ from one cohort to another.

**Timing of Departures by Grade**

- Among the Class of 2025, those who left MCPS primarily exited during Grade 10 (48.3%) and Grade 9 (36.0%).
- Class of 2026 departures occurred substantially earlier, with nearly two-thirds exiting in Grade 9 (62.5%), followed by Grade 10 (34.1%).
- Class of 2027 showed the earliest pattern, with almost all departures occurring in Grade 9 (89.7%).
- The Class of 2028 departures were exclusively in Grade 9 (100%), reflecting their single year of tenure in the district.

# Reasons for Leaving MCPS

## Documented Reasons for Student Exits

Reasons for Transfers and Withdrawal Without Completing High School
2022–2025

| Reasons | Transfer (N=24) | | Withdrawal (N=418) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | % | n | % |
| Not accessing educational services/Disengaged (Maybe whereabouts unknown, runaway or known or suspected abducted) | | | 259 | 62.0% |
| 18 years or older Student drops out due to a lack of motivation or interest to continue | | | 114 | 27.3% |
| 18 years or older Student certified employment and student unwilling to remain | | | 39 | 9.3% |
| 18 years or older — Leaves Due to Personal or Family Circumstances (includes: Leaves due to lack of financial resources, Leaves due to childcare responsibilities, Marriage certified by documentation) | | | 6 | 1.4% |
| Aged Out--Student has exceeded the age state guarantees a free education (21 before first day of classes) | 24 | 85.7% | | |
| Student who withdraws from educational services to pursue General Educational Development (GED) | 4 | 14.3% | | |

*Based on Exit Codes from Maryland Student Records Systems Manual (MSDE, 2025); data based on multiple year records.

## Findings

Between 2022 and 2025, of the 1,089 students participated in the SLIFE program, 418 students (38.4%) were withdrawn and 28 students (2.6%) were transferred, as categorized by Withdrawal or Transfer status in accordance with the MSDE Attendance Data Collection Manual (MSDE, 2025). Among withdrawals, the largest group were students listed as Not Accessing Educational Services (62.0%)-i.e., Maybe whereabouts unknown, runaway or known or suspected abducted which may reflect student disengagement.

Other recorded reasons included students aged 18 or older leaving due to lack of motivation or interest (27.3% of withdrawals), leaving due to employment commitments (9.3%), and leaving for personal or family circumstances, such as financial hardship, childcare responsibilities, or marriage (1.4%).

For transfers, the reasons were primarily age-related or credential-related. Twenty-four students (85.7% of transfers) were listed as “Aged Out—Student has exceeded the age state guarantees a free education (21 before first day of classes),” and 4 students (14.3% of transfers) were listed as “Student who withdraws from educational services to pursue General Educational Development (GED).”

# SLIFE Site-Level Survey

## Staff Directly Engaged in Planning the Instructional Program for SLIFE

### Staff Roles Involved in Planning and Coordinating Instructional Programs for SLIFE, by School Level (2024–2025)

| Staff Role | Middle Schools (N=10) | High Schools (N=11) |
|---|---|---|
| ELD teacher(s) | 10 (100.0%) | 7 (63.6%) |
| ELD content specialist/team leader* | 10 (100.0%) | |
| ELD resource teacher* | | 7 (63.6%) |
| Assistant principal(s) | 8 (80.0%) | 5 (45.5%) |
| Mathematics teacher(s) | 6 (60.0%) | 5 (45.5%) |
| Principal | 3 (30.0%) | 2 (18.2%) |
| Special education teacher(s) | 3 (30.0%) | 0 (0.0%) |
| Other (e.g., counselors, course scheduler, ELD counselor, therapeutic counselor) | 2 (20.0%) | 1 (9.1%) |
| Staff development teacher | 1 (10.0%) | 1 (9.1%) |
| ELA teacher(s) | 1 (10.0%) | 1 (9.1%) |

**Note*. ELD resource teachers are primarily located in high schools. The ELD content specialists and team leaders positions are in middle schools-a complementary staffing structure that aligns with different school levels.

Staff survey data (N=187) corroborated site-level reports, showing that English Language Development (ELD) staff played the central role in planning instruction for students. A clear majority of staff identified ELD resource teachers (82%), ELD teachers (74%), and academic counselors (60%) as most directly involved.

## Findings

In response to the survey item, "*Please select all staff members at your school who are involved directly in the planning and coordination of the instructional program for SLIFE at your site*," data were collected from 10 middle school and 11 high school SLIFE sites. The data showed that ELD instructional staff—teachers, content specialists/team leaders, and resource teachers—were most consistently involved in planning and coordinating SLIFE instructional programs.

ELD teachers were reported as involved in all middle schools (10 of 10; 100.0%) but in 7 of 11 high schools (63.6%). Middle schools also reported full participation of ELD content specialists or team leaders (10 of 10; 100.0%), whereas high schools relied more on ELD resource teachers (7 of 11; 63.6%). The involvement of administrators varied, with assistant principals reported as participating in 8 of 10 middle schools (80.0%) compared with 5 of 11 high schools (45.5%), and principals in 3 of 10 middle schools (30.0%) versus 2 of 11 high schools (18.2%). Mathematics teachers were reported as involved in 6 of 10 middle schools (60.0%) and 5 of 11 high schools (45.5%), while special education teachers were reported only in 3 of 10 middle schools (30.0%) and in none of the high schools.

Hardly any schools reported involvement from ELA teachers or other support staff in planning and coordinating their SLIFE instructional program

# SLIFE Site-Level Survey

## Elements of Secondary SLIFE Instructional Programs

### Reported Emphasis of Instructional Programs by School Level

| Specified Component | Middle Schools (N=9) | High Schools (N=11) |
|---|---|---|
| English Language Development Program | 9 (100.0%) | 9 (81.8%) |
| Basic Literacy | 8 (88.9%) | 10 (90.9%) |
| Basic Numeracy | 8 (88.9%) | 10 (90.9%) |
| Socio-Emotional Support | 7 (77.8%) | 8 (72.7%) |
| Reading Intervention* | 6 (66.7%) | 9 (81.8%) |
| Math Intervention* | 6 (66.7%) | 9 (81.8%) |
| Building foundational skills to support content standards | 6 (66.7%) | 8 (72.7%) |
| Content-area instruction aligned with grade-level standards | 5 (55.6%) | 6 (54.5%) |
| Cross-cultural orientation to the United States | 3 (33.3%) | 6 (54.5%) |
| Study Skills | 1 (11.1%) | 4 (36.4%) |
| Summer School | 1 (11.1%) | 0 (0.0%) |
| Credit Recovery | 0 (0.0%) | 1 (9.1%) |
| Pathways to Career | 0 (0.0%) | 1 (9.1%) |

## Findings

Staff at SLIFE sites were asked to describe what characterizes the program at their school. Responses from 9 of 10 middle schools and 11 of 12 high schools highlighted a focus on English language development (ELD) services, foundational literacy and numeracy skills, and socio-emotional supports. Nearly all SLIFE sites (88.8% to 100%) reported an emphasis on ELD, while socio-emotional support was also commonly provided, with 77.8% of middle schools and 72.7% of high schools identifying it as a key focus.

A higher proportion of high schools (81.8%) reported offering dedicated Reading and Math interventions compared with middle schools, where 66.7% of sites provided these supports.

Implementation of other program components varied considerably by developmental level. Cross-cultural orientation and Study Skills were offered by a higher proportion of high schools (54.5% and 36.4%, respectively) compared with middle schools (33.3% and 11.1%). High schools also reported offering specialized components such as Credit Recovery (9.1%) and Pathways to Career (9.1%), which are typically more relevant to graduation requirements. Conversely, Summer School was reported at only one middle school (11.1%).

# SLIFE Site-Level Survey

## Criteria for Assigning Staff to Classes for SLIFE

Themes from responses to the open-ended question: "*Please describe how staff members (e.g., teachers, paraeducators, and other personnel) are assigned to provide instruction in classes designated for SLIFE at your site.*"

| Criteria | Middle School | High School |
|---|---|---|
| **Specialized Training & Pedagogy** | Preference for teachers with middle school specific training (e.g., Orton-Gillingham, Circle Keepers) to support foundational literacy and early adolescent social-emotional development. | Requirement for SLIFE-related certifications (TESOL, ESOL, ELD, content, SPED) and training in targeted interventions (e.g., Read 180, Math 180). |
| **Student Integration & Foundational Support** | Priority for teachers who explicitly teach students "how to do school" and address attendance needs for younger adolescents transitioning into formal schooling. | Priority for teachers experienced with Newcomers at beginning English proficiency and significant gaps in formal education, and supporting intensive academic catch-up. |
| **Role of Paraeducators** | Paraeducators integrated to provide content and bilingual/biliterate support in small-group or one-on-one instruction. | |
| **Integrated Support & Community Linkages** | | Preference for teachers who collaborate with counselors and coordinators to address academic, social-emotional, and practical needs, connecting students and families to school and community resources. |
| **Staffing Based on Data & Resources** | | Staffing decisions informed by enrollment data to ensure appropriate class sizes and resource allocation. |
| **Adaptive Instructional Skills** | | Teachers expected to scaffold, modify curriculum, and adapt instruction across multiple content areas based on formative assessment. |

## Findings

Open-ended responses from 10 middle and 11 high school SLIFE sites indicated that schools use a careful, criteria-driven process to assign teachers, highlighting nuanced placement considerations.

**Middle School.** Teacher assignment at the middle school level emphasized foundational supports for early adolescents. Preference was given to teachers with training in literacy interventions and social-emotional development (e.g., Orton-Gillingham, Circle Keepers). Teachers were expected to teach students "how to do school," reinforcing academic habits, routines, and attendance. Paraeducators provided small-group and bilingual support to strengthen access to language and content.

**High School.** At the high school level, assignments focused on specialized training and certification. Teachers were required to hold relevant credentials (TESOL, ESOL, ELD, content, or SPED) and demonstrate skill with interventions such as Read 180 and Math 180. In some instances, enrollment data guided staffing decisions, and priority was given to teachers experienced with Newcomers at beginning English proficiency and with limited schooling. Teachers were also expected to work in concert with counselors to address social-emotional and practical needs, while adapting instruction through scaffolding, curriculum modification, and formative assessment across content areas.

# SLIFE Site-Level Survey

## Typical Resources Used in Classes for SLIFE

Responses to: *"Please describe the instructional resources you use for each of the areas (ELD, ELA, Content Areas) listed"*. The data are presented by content area and school level (Middle School (MS) and High School (HS).

| ELA/ELD | MS | HS |
|---|---|---|
| **I. Core Program Materials** | | |
| Read 180 (ELD/ELA) | ✓ | ✓ |
| StudySync (ELD/ELA) | ✓ | ✓ |
| The Code (HMH/Code 180) (ELD/ELA) | ✓ | ✓ |
| Language Launch (ELD) | ✓ | |
| iLit (ELA) | ✓ | |
| ELD Seminar Curriculum (ELD) | | ✓ |
| English 9/10 ELD Curriculum (Modified/Adapted) | | ✓ |
| **II. Supplemental Tools** | **MS** | **HS** |
| Whiteboards, Alphabet Charts, Grammar Tools | ✓ | |
| SLIFE Descriptors/Materials (Used for adaptation) | ✓ | |
| DME Resources (or pacing aligned to DME) | | ✓ |
| IXL | | ✓ |
| Teacher Supplements/Graphic Organizers | ✓ | ✓ |

| Mathematics | MS | HS |
|---|---|---|
| **I. Core Program Materials** | | |
| Math 180 (Math) | ✓ | ✓ |
| Illustrative Math (Math) | ✓ | ✓ |
| County/District Curriculum (Content Areas) | ✓ | ✓ |
| **II. Math Supports & Tools** | | |
| Manipulatives (e.g., base-10 blocks) | ✓ | |
| Support from Math Concepts Class | ✓ | |
| IXL | | ✓ |
| YouTube, Delta Math | | ✓ |
| Tiered Intervention Tools (e.g., Tier 1/Tier 2) | | ✓ |

| Content Area Science and Social Studies | MS | HS |
|---|---|---|
| Newsela | ✓ | ✓ |
| BrainPOP | ✓ | ✓ |
| Rewordify | ✓ | |
| Canva for Education | ✓ | |
| Media Center Resources (Supplemental) | | ✓ |
| Curriculum Adapted to WIDA/Proficiency Levels | ✓ | ✓ |

## Findings

For ELD and ELA, both middle and high SLIFE site teams reported they relied on core literacy interventions such as Read 180, StudySync, and The Code (HMH/Code 180). Middle School teachers reported using Language Launch, iLit, and SLIFE Descriptors/Materials, while High School teams a adapted English 9/10 ELD Curriculum, and used digital tools like IXL to support skill development.

In Mathematics, both levels used Math 180 and Illustrative Math as core programs. Middle School teams reinforced foundational concepts through manipulatives and a Math Concepts Class, whereas High School teams expanded to digital supports such as Delta Math, and tiered interventions to scaffold complex content.

Across content areas like Science and Social Studies, teachers at both levels rely heavily on supplementary digital platforms such as Newsela and BrainPOP to bridge language and content gaps. Middle Schools use additional scaffolds such as Rewordify and Canva for Education to simplify text and support engagement, while High Schools depended on Media Center Resources and teacher-selected materials to make grade-level content accessible. Despite these creative adaptations, both levels emphasized the limited access to SLIFE-specific materials and the insufficient differentiation of the curriculum in content areas.

# SLIFE Site-Level Survey

## Strategies for Addressing Student Needs

Themes from responses to the open-ended question: *"For each of the listed components of the SLIFE program, please describe how it is implemented or organized at your school."*

| Approach | How Sites Organized and Implemented Program Components |
|---|---|
| **Methods to Reach Out to Families** | Schools primarily used Remind (a communication platform that helps educators reach students and parents where they are), phone calls, and email. Many sites leveraged a Parent Community Coordinator (PCC) and other support staff (e.g., counselors) to facilitate deeper communication, especially for in-person meetings and home visits. |
| **Onsite Counseling Services to SLIFE** | The majority offered counseling via a designated ELD or EML counselor for social, emotional, and academic support. Schools frequently utilized other on-site resources like Wellness Centers, therapeutic counselors, and community partnerships (e.g., Every Mind, Linkages to Learning). |
| **Coordination of Special Education Services** | The process typically started with a Multi-Tiered Support Team (EMT) review when a concern arose. Sites coordinated with a Resource Teacher in Special Education (RTSE) to initiate formal evaluation. However, some sites noted challenges or a lack of established processes. |
| **Designing Student Schedules** | Scheduling was a collaborative effort involving ELD teachers, counselors, and the master scheduler. Priority was given to placing students in small intervention classes for reading and math, often alongside a dual-period English Language Development (ELD) block. Students were mainstreamed into co-taught or general education classes and electives to promote interaction. |
| **New Student Orientation** | New students and their families received orientation, often led by counselors and PCCs. A key strategy was assigning a student ambassador or buddy to aid navigation during the first weeks. Translators were frequently used to ensure family understanding. |
| **Mainstreaming/Social Integration** | Integration was primarily achieved by mainstreaming students into general education and elective classes (e.g., art, music, PE). Many schools implemented a "buddy system" or student ambassador program. Some sites maintained more formal structures like Newcomers groups or Advisory periods. |
| **Access to Support Services (e.g., tutors, PCCs, counselors)** | Access was ensured through a multi-layered approach involving counselors and PCCs. Information was shared via translated materials, parent meetings, and workshops. Staff utilized direct referrals and "warm handoffs" to connect families with both school-based and community resources. |

## Findings

Twenty-one SLIFE sites responded to the question, "For each of the listed components of the SLIFE program, please describe how it is implemented or organized at your school. From the open-ended responses of 21 sites, schools reported a multidimensional approach to addressing student needs. These practices detailed how sites addressed academic, social, and emotional needs through intentional coordination and communication.

- **Outreach to Families**: Schools used Remind, phone calls, and emails for communication, with support staff coordinating meetings and home visits.
- **Counseling Services**: Dedicated ELD/EML counselors were provided, often in collaboration with community organizations, for additional support.
- **Special Education Services**: Identification often began with a Multi-Tiered Support Team (EMT). Site teams coordinated with a Resource Teacher in Special Education (RTSE) to initiate formal evaluations; however, some teams noted that the processes were still developing and needed improvement.
- **Student Schedules**: Schools prioritized small intervention classes for reading and mathematics while balancing placement in mainstream classes.
- **New Student and Social Integration**: Orientation and student ambassadors helped SLIFE acclimate, supplemented by mainstream classes and Newcomers group formation.
- **Access to Support Services/Resources:** Schools ensured families accessed resources through translated materials, meetings, and direct referrals, providing consistent support.

# SLIFE Site-Level Survey

## Operational Factors Affecting Implementation of the SLIFE Program

Themes from responses to the open-ended question: *Have any of the listed factors affected the implementation of the SLIFE program at your site? If yes, please explain how*.

| Factor | Expected Approach & Common Practice | Challenges & Concerns |
|---|---|---|
| **Curriculum & Standards** | **Expected Approach**: Sites were expected to align instruction with grade-level standards and integrate WIDA ELD standards. **Common Practice:** Sites used district curricula and specific programs (e.g., Read 180). | The primary challenge was the mismatch between students' low foundational skills and the fast pace of grade-level curricula. A key concern was that district-provided resources were often inadequate or contained broken links, forcing teachers to find their own materials. |
| **Program Structure & Capacity** | **Expected Approach**: Program structure was intended to be adaptable based on enrollment. **Common Practice**: Sites utilized flexible capacity, ranging from very small (2-4 students) to larger (20-28 students), often combining grade levels or using specific SLIFE-only or co-taught classes (with ELD and content area teachers). | Challenges arose from enrollment extremes: low enrollment limited the ability to offer necessary interventions, while over-enrollment in co-taught settings risked overlooking SLIFE students' needs and limited engaging discourse. |
| **Staffing** | **Expected Approach**: Maintain a consistent, qualified staff. **Common Practice:** Most schools reported low staff turnover, which promoted program consistency and strong relationships; some staff were trained on WIDA standards. | Challenges included staffing vacancies requiring teacher reassignment. The main concern was the difficulty of finding staff with specific SLIFE related experience and certification, and the potential for increasing workloads to lead to higher turnover. |
| **Rolling Enrollment & Logistics** | **Expected Approach**: Manage incoming students efficiently throughout the year. **Common Practice:** Students were enrolled throughout the school year, impacting initial scheduling and group stability. | Challenges included fluctuations in enrollment, complicating scheduling, and the difficulty of placing new, mid-year students into established groups. A serious concern was the high-level trauma and mental health needs of some newcomers, which exceeded available support at the sites. |
| **Instructional Resources** | **Expected Approach**: Utilize appropriate resources to bridge academic gaps. **Common Practice**: Schools used a variety of resources, including district curricula, IXL, Kids Discover Online, and sentence frames. | The main concern was that many available resources were inappropriate for high school students with limited formal education. Specific programs (e.g., Read 180) were viewed as insufficient for zero-prior-instruction students, as they assumed some level of foundational knowledge. |

## Findings

Open-ended responses from 20 sites reported a persistent tension between implementing a coherent instructional program and meeting students' needs with the resources available. Staff reported pressure to build students' mathematics and literacy skills, teach grade-level standards, and ensure on-time graduation, while contending with substantial academic gaps. EMLs with interrupted education, although often bright and capable of abstract thinking, were in the SLIFE program because they lacked foundational reading and mathematics skills, creating a challenging balancing act for teachers and administrators.

Responses indicated that the absence of a comprehensive, SLIFE-specific curriculum was a major challenge. District-provided resources were often inadequate or misaligned, leaving teachers to supplement with tools such as IXL, which only partially addressed students' learning gaps.

In some sites, fluctuating enrollment complicated both class scheduling and staffing. Low enrollment at times restricted the availability of interventions, while high enrollment in co-taught classes risked individual student needs being overlooked. Although staffing was generally stable, sites reported concerns about retaining qualified teachers given heavy workloads and the difficulty of recruiting staff with specialized expertise.

# Program Size 2022 Through 2025

## Number of Sites Reporting Frequency of Expected Activities by School Level (2024–2025)

**Middle School**

| Activities | | At least once week | | 2-3 times a month | | Per marking period/Quarterly | | Not at all | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **N** | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| Provide small group enrichment. | **9** | 3 | 33.3% | 2 | 22.2% | 2 | 22.2% | 2 | 22.2% |
| Track/review student progress in ELD. | **10** | 0 | 0.0% | 5 | 50.0% | 5 | 50.0% | 0 | 0.0% |
| Establish/review individualized goals for students. | **10** | 1 | 10.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 5 | 50.0% | 4 | 40.0% |
| Track/review student progress in content areas. | **10** | 1 | 10.0% | 3 | 30.0% | 5 | 50.0% | 1 | 10.0% |
| Meet with school leadership to discuss SLIFE. | **9** | 0 | 0.0% | 2 | 22.2% | 3 | 33.3% | 4 | 44.4% |
| Meet/collaborate with peers at other SLIFE sites. | **9** | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 9 | 100.0% |
| School-wide professional learning on working with SLIFE. | **10** | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 3 | 30.0% | 7 | 70.0% |

**High School**

| | At least once week | | 2-3 times a month | | Per marking period/Quarterly | | Not at all | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **N** | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % |
| **7** | 3 | 42.9% | 1 | 14.3% | 1 | 14.3% | 2 | 28.6% |
| **7** | 2 | 28.6% | 1 | 14.3% | 3 | 42.9% | 1 | 14.3% |
| **7** | 1 | 14.3% | 2 | 28.6% | 4 | 57.1% | 0 | 0.0% |
| **7** | 1 | 14.3% | 0 | 0.0% | 3 | 42.9% | 3 | 42.9% |
| **7** | 0 | 0.0% | 2 | 28.6% | 1 | 14.3% | 4 | 57.1% |
| **7** | 0 | 0.0% | 1 | 14.3% | 2 | 28.6% | 4 | 57.1% |
| **7** | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 1 | 14.3% | 6 | 85.7% |

## Findings

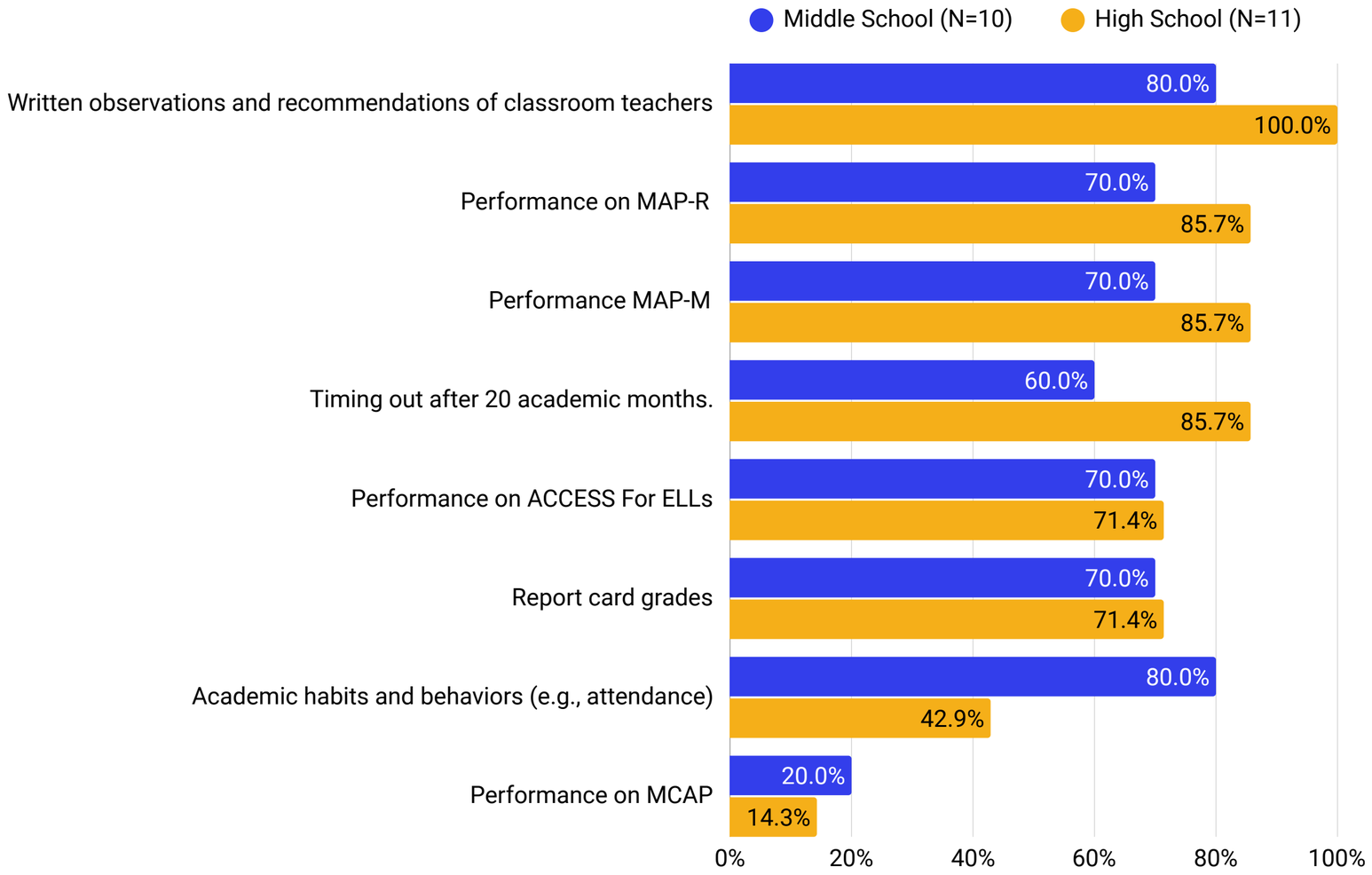
Data from ten middle and seven high school SLIFE sites (not all 11 schools responded to these items) revealed notable variation in the frequency of expected activities to support teaching and learning.

- Small group enrichment was the most consistently implemented activity, with four middle schools and three high schools conducting sessions weekly.
- Tracking and reviewing student progress in ELD was regularly performed across schools, typically 2–3 times per month or quarterly, indicating moderate consistency in monitoring English language development.
- Establishment or review of individualized student goals was reported by five middle schools (all implementing quarterly). Among high schools, four implemented this quarterly, and two implemented it 2–3 times per month. Five middle schools reported that they did not implement this at all.
- Most schools reported tracking and reviewing progress in content areas, though high schools displayed more variability in frequency.
- School-wide professional learning on SLIFE and collaboration with peers at other sites were rarely or not done at all; the majority of middle schools (n=8) and high schools (n=6) reported no professional learning, while collaboration was absent in all middle schools and most high schools.
- Meetings with school leadership were similarly infrequent, with nearly half of schools reporting no implementation.

# SLIFE Site-Level Survey

## Data Used to Inform Decisions for Students Exiting the Program

### Number of Sites Reporting Data Sources (N=21)




## Findings

Students are expected to have a maximum of 21 academic months in the SLIFE program before transitioning to non-SLIFE classes, with exit decisions made by a workgroup. From a list of options, the site-level survey asked sites to select all applicable information they consider when determining SLIFE exit readiness: "*What information do you consider when determining whether a student is ready to transition/exit out of SLIFE status? (Check all that apply.*)?" Data showed that schools used a variety of information, primarily relying on teacher input, language proficiency scores, and academic performance.

**Shared Criteria:** The information reported by the majority of schools, regardless of level, was: language proficiency data, academic performance, and teacher input, which formed the foundation of most exit decisions.

- Written observations and recommendations of classroom teachers (Middle: 80.0%; High: 100.0%)
- Performance on ACCESS for ELLs (Middle: 70.0%; High: 71.4%)
- Report card grades (Middle: 70.0%; High: 71.4%)

**Level-Specific Emphasis:** Some differences reflected school level focus:

- High Schools: More high schools reported using time in program than middle schools (85.7% vs. 60.0%).
- Middle Schools: Nearly all middle schools reported using academic habits and behaviors (e.g., attendance) (80.0% vs. 42.9% for high schools), suggesting an emphasis on engagement and readiness for mainstream instruction.

# SLIFE Site-Level Survey

## Successful Elements of the Secondary SLIFE Program

Themes from responses to the open-ended question: "*What Are the Most Successful Aspects of the SLIFE Program at Your Site*?"

| Successful Elements | Description |
|---|---|
| Small Class Sizes | Classes were intentionally kept small, enabling individualized instruction and relationship building. |
| Individualized/Targeted Support | Students received one-on-one or small group instruction tailored to literacy and math needs. |
| Dedicated Staff | Teachers and paraeducators were described as passionate, skilled, and committed to SLIFE students. |
| Holistic Student Support | Students received counseling, wellness resources, and social-emotional check-ins. |
| Observable Academic Progress | Students were reported to be making gains in MAP scores, class assessments, and ACCESS scores. |
| Positive School Integration | Students were involved in extracurricular activities and felt welcomed by peers and the community. |
| Strong Collaboration Among Staff | A coordinated team approach between EML teachers, counselors, and support staff was emphasized. |
| Specialized Materials/Instruction | Consistent use of EML-specific curriculum and supports like a trained reading specialist. |

## Findings

An analysis of open-ended responses from 21 sites revealed that the most successful aspects of the SLIFE program fell into three primary categories: program structure, staff dedication, and observable progress and engagement in students.

**Structure Supporting Individualized Learning**: Site teams consistently reported that small class sizes were foundational to the program's success, enabling staff to provide targeted instruction in literacy and mathematics. The use of specialized instructional materials and the support of reading specialists and paraeducators were reported as crucial for providing differentiation.

**Committed and Collaborative Staff:** Staff responses frequently highlighted the dedication and expertise of professionals working with EMLs. Teams emphasized a collaborative approach among ELD teachers and EML therapeutic staff to holistically address students' academic, linguistic, and social-emotional needs.

**Demonstrated Student Progress and School Engagement**: Staff observations indicated measurable academic gains in their students, which were directly linked to consistent attendance and the small class setting. Beyond academics, staff reported that students became more engaged in school life, supported by a welcoming school climate that fostered connection, confidence, and resilience.

# SLIFE Site-Level Survey

## Challenges to Effective Instruction for Secondary SLIFE Program

Themes from responses to the open-ended question: *"Has your school faced any challenges with implementing the instructional program for SLIFE as desired?"*

| Challenges | English Language Development | Content Area |
|---|---|---|
| Inadequate Curriculum and Instructional Resources | Lack of a dedicated SLIFE curriculum; overemphasis on complex academic content instead of foundational skills like phonics and pronunciation; use of inappropriate or juvenile materials. | Lack of accessible content-area curricula tailored to SLIFE students; existing curricula were too linguistically complex; content teachers reported limited or no training to modify materials. |
| Pre-existing Academic Skill Gaps | Students had limited or no literacy in their first language, creating barriers to acquiring English and engaging with grade-level language demands. | Students' foundational skill gaps, particularly in literacy, hindered their ability to access and optimally learn grade-level content in subjects like math, science, and social studies. |
| Personnel Shortages and Instructional Capacity: | Staffing shortages (e.g., bilingual educators, paraeducators) limited the ability to meet student needs; professional development was not aligned with SLIFE literacy. | Many content teachers lacked preparation, strategies, or flexibility to differentiate instruction; need for more co-teaching models and targeted professional development. |
| Program Structure & Scheduling | The standard two-year program was seen as too brief for students to develop foundational English and literacy skills, leading to widening learning gaps and frustration. | Students were often placed into grade-level content classes before acquiring sufficient English proficiency, limiting their ability to engage with rigorous coursework. |
| Barriers to Engagement and Academic Progress | Absenteeism, family responsibilities, and reliance on native language within peer groups were persistent barriers to engagement and consistent growth in English acquisition. | Economic pressures, cultural adjustment challenges, and students' reliance on their native language slowed English acquisition and limited participation in content classes. |
| Insufficient Resources and Access to Technology | Staffing shortages limited instructional support; lack of effective professional development. | Shortages of bilingual educators, paraeducators, and co-teachers; lack of instructional resources like translated materials, visual aids, and language-support technology. |

## Findings

Based on responses from 21 site-level surveys, similar instructional challenges were identified across both ELD instruction and content areas.

- **Curriculum and Resource Mismatch**: Staff lacked a curriculum aligned to the needs of SLIFE, which often led to an overemphasis on complex academic content instead of foundational skills like phonics.
- **Existing Academic Skills Gaps:** Many students had limited literacy in their first language and minimal prior schooling, impeding their ability to learn English quickly and access grade-level content.
- **Personnel Shortages and Instructional Capacity**: ELD faced shortages of bilingual educators, limiting personalized support. Content teachers were often unprepared to differentiate instruction effectively, highlighting a need for co-teaching models and targeted professional development.
- **Inadequate Program Timeline:** The standard two-year program duration was seen as too brief, often resulting in students being placed into grade-level classes before they had sufficient English language proficiency.
- **Barriers to Engagement and Academic Progress** Barriers such as absenteeism, reliance on native language within peer groups, were cited as hindrances to engagement and English acquisition. For content-area learning, economic pressures, challenges to adjusting to school culture also limited student participation in the classroom environment
- **Insufficient Instructional Resources:** Sites reported shortages of essential resources, including translated materials, visual aids, and language-support technology.

# SLIFE Site-Level Survey

## Changes in Student Enrollment and Instructional Needs Over Time

Themes from responses to the open-ended question: *"Over time, what changes (if any), have you observed in the number and instructional needs of SLIFE coming to your site? Please describe any notable trends or shifts in the SLIFE population.*

| Changes in Students | Description of Reported Changes |
|---|---|
| Shifting Enrollment | Respondents noted variations in SLIFE student numbers, with comments like "increased in the number of students," "Numbers have decreased," "a decrease in overall enrollment," and "less SLIFE this year than in past years." |
| Evolving Academic & Instructional Needs | The responses highlighted changes in academic and instructional demands. Specific phrases used were "instructional needs remain high," "academic needs of our SLIFE students have become more" . This also included observations that "students are coming more traumatized," indicating a shift in the overall profile of incoming students. |
| Increased Social-Emotional & Support Needs | Several responses pointed to a growing demand for social-emotional support. Direct quotes such as "Students are struggling more and skipping classes" underscore a heightened need for interventions beyond academics. The presence of a "SLIFE counselor specific to the needs of students acclimating" also suggests a recognized need for specialized support. |
| Technological Acuity | A distinct observation was made regarding students' tech skills: "Students are more advanced in tech skills." This indicated a noticeable shift in students' foundational technological understanding, which could influence teaching methods and resource utilization. |

## Findings

The data, derived from open-ended responses from the 21 sites, revealed several key shifts in the needs of students with limited or interrupted formal education coming to each site over time. Participants had observed fluctuations in enrollment, some noting increases or decreases in student numbers.

A notable emerging theme was the increased prevalence of trauma among incoming students. Academically, the instructional needs of these students remained high and appeared to become more varied, with specific mentions of increased student struggles and issues with class attendance. As such, comments also conveyed a heightened demand for social-emotional support, as reflected in the identified need for specialized counseling services. This suggests a more complex array of learning challenges and a need for differentiated instruction.

A notable trend was that more recent students demonstrated greater technological proficiency compared with previous cohorts.

# SLIFE Site-Level Survey

## Recommendations for Improvements of Seconday SLIFE Program

**Redesign Curriculum and Instructional Tools.** Schools strongly suggested the adoption of curriculum materials designed for older emergent readers and SLIFE learners. These resources should be age-appropriate, engaging, and focused on bridging academic gaps, and also be sufficient for coherent Tier 1 instruction (the universal tier, provided to all students every day)

**Professional Development (PD) and Administrator Training**. Many have requested targeted professional development for both content and ELD teachers. This includes training on trauma-informed practices, co-teaching models, foundational literacy skills, and differentiation strategies specifically for SLIFE. Emphasis was placed on the need for administrators to receive training to foster a deeper understanding of and prioritization for SLIFE programming at the school level.

**Expanded Support Structures and Staffing**. Schools advocated for more flexible staffing allocations, dedicated mental health providers, and support roles, such as SLIFE coordinators. Some proposed having a fully released ELD/SLIFE staff to manage logistics, support instruction, and enhance family engagement.

**Policy and Program Adjustment.** Recommendations included allowing students to remain in the SLIFE program for more than two years if necessary, removing strict timelines for exit, basing it more on skill level, and improving tracking of students after they exit to ensure ongoing support. A more centralized approach to designating SLIFE sites based on enrollment was also suggested.

**Suggested Professional Learning Opportunities (PLOs) Topics and Themes**

- Trauma-informed (pedagogical approach that recognizes how trauma can affect a student's ability to learn and behave in the classroom) and culturally responsive teaching methods
- Foundational literacy strategies for older learners
- Sheltered instruction and academic language scaffolding (e.g., SIOP)
- Collaborative and co-teaching models
- Effective family engagement strategies
- Support mechanisms for non-ELD content teachers working with SLIFE students
- Utilization of adaptive tools (e.g., speech-to-text)
- Fostering student agency and expression
- Wraparound services and coordination among agencies

**Further comments indicated a strong desire for the following:**

- Increased summer and after-school opportunities for EMLs with interrupted education.
- Clearer guidance at the county level regarding staffing and site designation.
- Enhanced collaboration among schools and across various staff roles.
- A comparable program to assist students with substantial gaps in learning who have not experienced interrupted schooling.

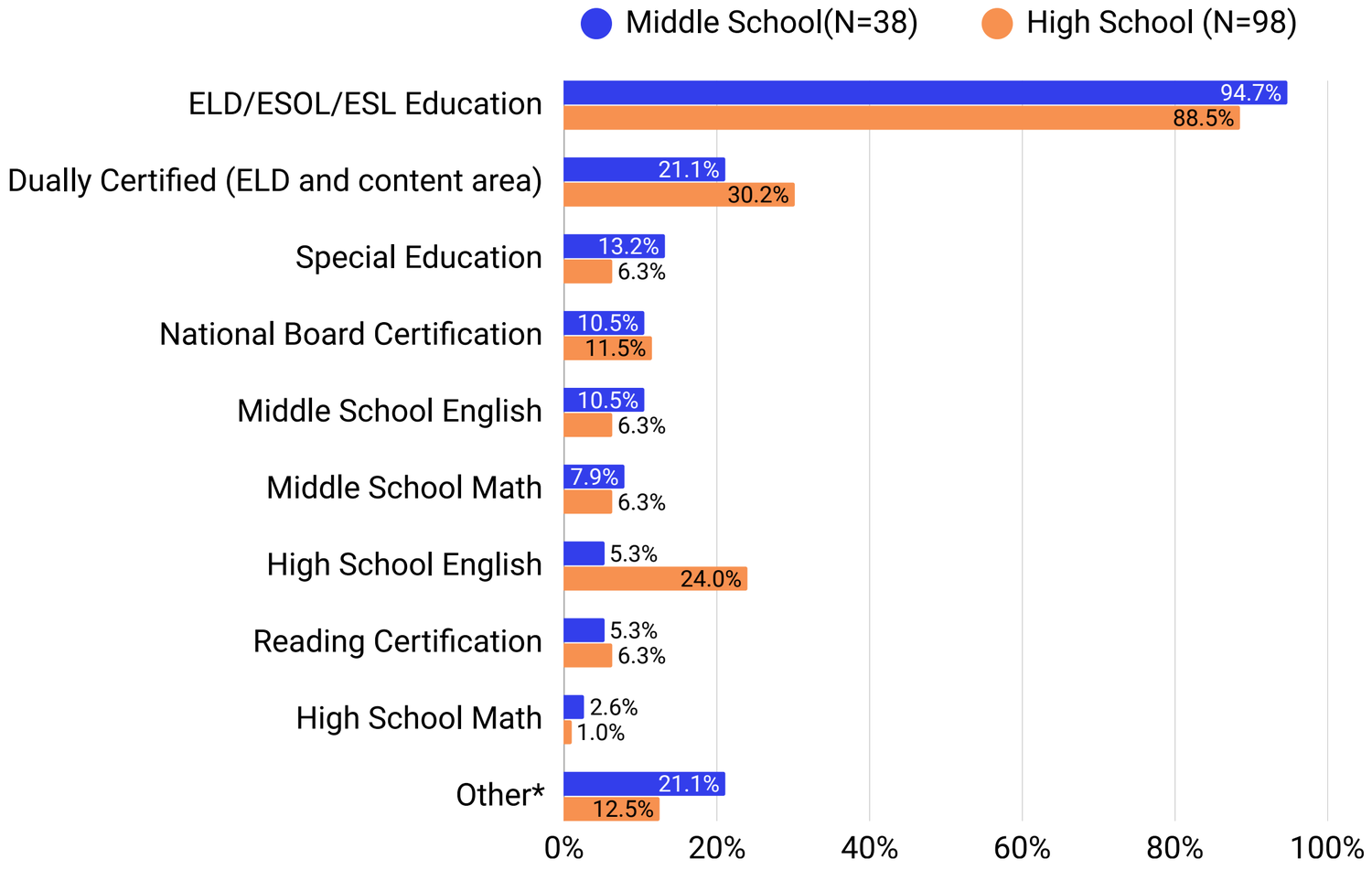
**Findings**

When asked, *"What changes, if any, would you recommend to improve the effectiveness of the secondary SLIFE program ?"*, school teams called for a comprehensive overhaul of how the Secondary SLIFE program is supported—from materials and training to staffing and structures. Emphasis was placed on the need for instructional resources appropriate to the age of middle and high school students, scaffolded instruction, stronger interdepartmental collaboration, and systems that acknowledge the long-term nature of academic recovery for students with interrupted education. There was a clear desire for differentiated, hands-on, and role-specific professional learning that addresses both academic and emotional development for SLIFE. Schools also want professional learning opportunities that are collaborative, practical, and ongoing, with a focus on equipping all staff—not just ELD teachers—to effectively support EMLs with interrupted education.

# Staff Survey

## Credentials of School-Based Staff Working with SLIFE

Percentage of School-Based Respondents Indicating Certification by School Level




## Findings

Survey invitations were sent to school-based staff who currently or previously taught SLIFE-designated classes or were assigned to SLIFE sites. Respondents were asked to select all applicable certification or endorsement areas from a list of nine, with the option to specify other areas as needed. Most staff held ELD/ESOL/ESL certification, including 94.7% of middle school and 88.5% of high school respondents. About a fifth of middle school staff (21.1%) and 30.2% of high school staff reported being dually certified in ELD and a content area.

English language arts certification was more common at the high school level (24.0%) than at the middle school level (10.5%). Smaller proportions reported special education (13.2% in middle school and 6.3% in high school) and National Board Certification (10.5% in middle school and 11.5% in high school). Few reported any certification in high school mathematics, ranging from 2.6% at the middle school level to 1.0% at the high school level. Reading certifications were reported by 5.3% of middle school and 6.3% of high school respondents.

"Other" certifications, reported by 21.1% of middle school and 12.5% of high school staff, included content areas such as social studies, arts, and world languages, as well as early childhood/general education. Smaller proportions held leadership, counseling, or family literacy endorsements.

# Staff Survey

## Respondents' Responsibilities in the SLIFE Program

| Staff Responsibilities | School Based (N=149) | Central Office* (N=38) |
|---|---|---|
| | % | % |
| ELD instruction (teacher) | 76.3 | 0 |
| Instructor for content area (e.g., English, Math) | 39.6 | 0 |
| Participating in End-of-Year SLIFE stakeholder meetings | 16.5 | 33.3 |
| Parent outreach/supporting families | 15.8 | 66.7 |
| Implementing IEPs for students identified as SLIFEs | 10.8 | 0.0 |
| Creating schedule for SLIFE | 9.4 | 0.0 |
| Administering intake assessments for newcomer EMLs | 7.2 | 20.8 |
| Exiting students from SLIFE sites/programs | 6.5 | 8.3 |
| Facilitating the transfers/withdrawals process at the school level. | 6.5 | 8.3 |
| Maintaining rosters and databases on students participating in SLIFE sites | 5.8 | 12.5 |
| Facilitating articulation plans for students who enter MCPS in the SLIFE program | 5.8 | 4.2 |
| Registration of SLIFE at the school site | 4.3 | 0.0 |
| Counseling | 3.6 | 41.7 |
| Providing PLOs for staff in the secondary SLIFE program | 2.9 | 8.3 |
| Preparing documentation/packets that is sent to schools/SLIFE sites | 1.4 | 16.7 |
| Facilitating professional learning opportunities (PLOs) for staff working with SLIFE | 1.4 | 12.5 |
| Assigning identified students to SLIFE sites | 0 | 12.5 |

*The central office staff consists of team members from DME, IAE, and OWSSB, who are district-level personnel responsible for roles related to the SLIFE program.

## Findings

When asked to check all responsibilities that applied to their role from a list, the SLIFE program, school-based, and central office staff reported distinct but complementary roles. The majority of school-based staff indicated that they provide ELD instruction (76.3%) with additional responsibilities including content-area teaching (39.6%). Some reported their responsibilities included participating in end-of-year stakeholder meetings (16.5%), parent outreach and family support (15.8%), implementing IEPs (10.8%), and creating schedules for SLIFE (9.4%).

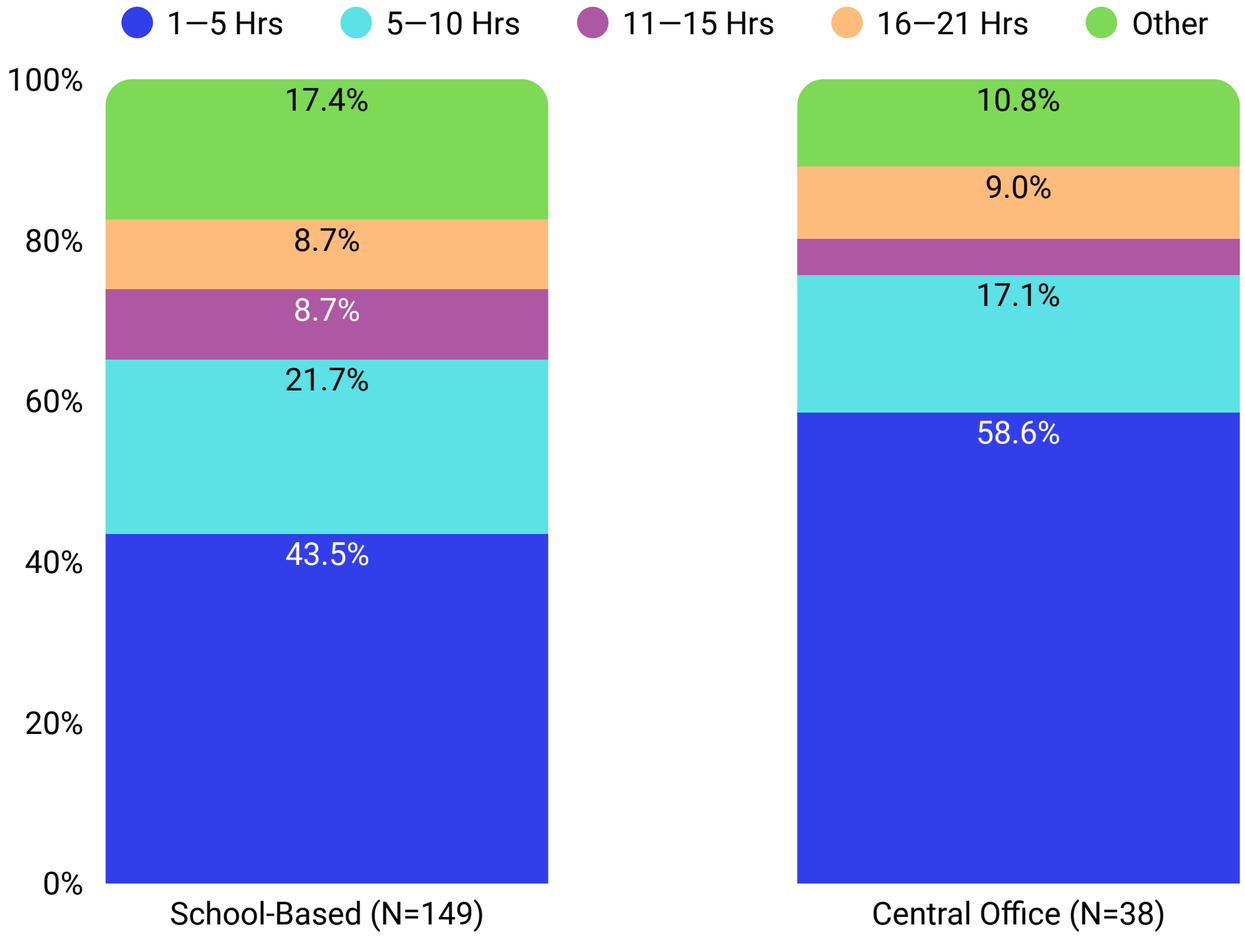
Central office staff, on the other hand, identified responsibilities aligned with program coordination and system-level supports. The most frequently reported responsibilities included parent outreach and family support (66.7%), counseling services (41.7%), and participation in end-of-year stakeholder meetings (33.3%).

Other responsibilities among central office staff included administering intake assessments (20.8%). Central office staff were also the only ones, albeit in small numbers, who reported assigning students to SLIFE sites (12.5%), preparing documentation for schools (16.7%), or facilitating professional learning (12.5%).

# Staff Survey

## Hours of Professional Learning Opportunities (PLOs)

### Percentage of Staff Reporting PLO Hours Related to SLIFE




## Findings

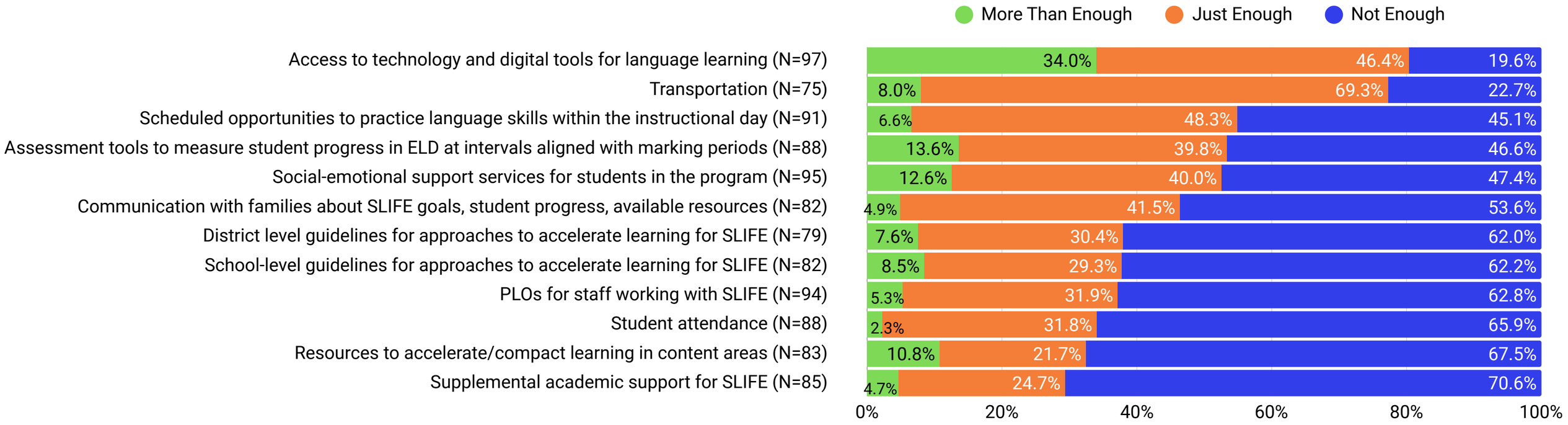
Staff were asked, *"Including summer, approximately how many total hours of Professional Learning Opportunities (MCPS-sponsored) have you completed this school-year specifically related to SLIFE (including areas such as teaching, learning, monitoring academic progress, or addressing socio-emotional needs)? Please select the range that best represents your total hours."* Among school-based staff, 65.2% reported completing 10 hours or less (43.5%: 1–5 hours; 21.7%: 5–10 hours). Central office staff reported similar participation, with 75.7% completing 10 hours or less (58.6%: 1–5 hours; 17.1%: 5–10 hours).

Open-ended responses from those who chose "Other" revealed three recurring themes:

- Some staff indicated they had EMLs with interrupted education in their classes, even though their school did not have an official SLIFE program or site, leading to a gap in formal support.
- Several respondents mentioned a lack of access to SLIFE-specific training, either due to it not being offered or them not receiving relevant information.
- A few staff noted that their professional roles (such as ELD teachers or content-area instructional staff) excluded them from SLIFE-specific PLOs. Others mentioned that even when they were instructing SLIFE students, or were new to SLIFE or MCPS, they had not yet had the opportunity to participate in any PLO.

# Staff Survey

## Perceptions of Supports and Resources: Secondary SLIFE Program




## Findings

Survey results from 75–97 staff members (depending on the item) revealed varying perceptions of the adequacy of resources and supports for the Secondary SLIFE program. “Do not know” responses were excluded, resulting in slight differences in the number of respondents per item.

- **Areas Viewed as Adequate (More or Just Enough)**. Overall, a clear majority of respondents rated certain foundational resources as adequate, particularly access to technology and digital tools for language learning (80.4%), transportation (77.3%), and scheduled opportunities to practice language skills within the instructional day (54.9%).
- **Areas with Divided Perceptions.** Perceptions were more divided for assessment tools to measure ELD progress (53.4%), social-emotional support services for SLIFE (52.6%), and communication with families about SLIFE goals, student progress, and available resources (46.4%).
- **Areas Most Rated as Insufficient (Not Enough)**. Most respondents viewed most aspects as insufficient: district-level guidelines for accelerating SLIFE learning (62.0%), school-level guidelines (62.2%), professional learning opportunities (62.8%), attendance supports (65.9%), resources to accelerate or compact content-area learning (67.5%), and supplemental academic supports (70.6%)

# Staff Survey

## Successful Elements of the Secondary SLIFE Program

Themes from responses to the open-ended question: "*What Are the Most Successful Aspects of the SLIFE Program at Your Site*?"

| Successful Elements | Description |
|---|---|
| Individualized Instruction & Small Classes | Small groupings, sheltered classes, leveled instruction, individualized attention, and tiered placement allow teachers to address unique student needs effectively. Enables academic risk-taking in a safe environment. |
| Selection of Appropriately Trained Staff | Appropriate assignment of teachers with ELD certification nd experience with SLIFE, sometimes bilingual or dually certified, co-teaching models (ELD + content), reading/math specialists, and collaboration among staff support student growth. |
| Extended & Additional Support | Extra periods for reading/mathematics, paraeducator support, co-teaching, double periods, and individualized scaffolding support deeper learning and credit accumulation. |
| Instructional Strategies Integrating of Language & Content | Explicit instruction of reading, writing, and subject-specific vocabulary integrated with content learning. Pre-teaching, scaffolds, and visuals help students access rigorous curricula. High school-specific use of pre-US History, pre-science, and foundational courses to build prior knowledge for newcomers before entering mainstream content classes. |
| Social-Emotional & Cultural Support | Safe, inclusive environment; culturally responsive teaching; SEL support; trust-building; connection with families; supports engagement, attendance, and confidence. |
| Progress Monitoring & Feedback | Frequent checks, co-planning, formative assessments, MAPS, and structured programs allowed teachers to track student growth and adjust instruction accordingly. |
| Instructional Programs | Use of structured programs: Read 180, Math 180, HMH Math, IXL, and supplemental ELD/reading interventions to reinforce skills and bridge gaps. |
| Structured Routines & Family Engagement | Helping students adjust to school routines, navigate procedures, and develop independent learning strategies supports engagement and confidence and involving families improved student outcomes and program success. |

# Findings

Thematic analysis of the 120 open-ended responses yielded eight main areas of success across both ELD instruction and content-area instruction, reported at both middle and high school levels.

Small, skill-based classes provided individualized instruction and one-on-one support, enabling students to develop foundational literacy, mathematics, and language skills in a supportive environment. The use of carefully selected staff, co-teaching, and sheltered instruction provided access to grade-level content while offering targeted language support, helping students engage meaningfully in core academic subjects. Dedicated reading classes and phonics-based interventions accelerated English development and comprehension. At the same time, sheltered math courses and scaffolding strategies helped students close academic skills and knowledge gaps, preparing them for higher-level coursework.

Instructional strategies such as visuals, modeling, and step-by-step guidance supported comprehension across subjects and ensured access to grade-level standards. Close communication with families and strong teacher-student relationships fostered trust, engagement, and a supportive school environment. Technology platforms such as IXL and HMH Math 180 provided individualized practice and language reinforcement, enabling teachers to differentiate instruction effectively.

# Staff Survey

## Challenges: Advancing English Language Development

Themes from responses to the open-ended question: "*What are the biggest challenges in accelerating English Language development for SLIFE?*"

| Challenge | Description |
|---|---|
| Inadequate Curriculum & Materials | Staff reported the absence of a curriculum dedicated to the needs of SLIFE, leading to reliance on materials not designed for this population. This often resulted in an emphasis on complex academic content rather than foundational literacy skills such as phonics, pronunciation, and functional language. |
| Students' Foundational Skill Gaps | Many students entered the program with limited or no literacy in their first language and minimal prior formal schooling, making it difficult to acquire English language skills and keep pace with grade-level standards. |
| External and Logistical Impediments to Full Student Participation | Absenteeism, competing family responsibilities, limited motivation, and difficulty adjusting to school routines and technology use were reported as factors affecting student engagement and full participation in learning. |
| Unrealistic Program Timeframes | The two-year program timeline was widely reported as insufficient for addressing learning gaps and building the skills needed before students are expected to meet grade-level expectations. |
| Insufficient Staffing & Support | Staffing limitations, particularly a shortage of bilingual educators and paraeducators, were reported as affecting the ability to address the variety of academic and social-emotional needs within the program for SLIFE. |
| Lack of Targeted Professional Development | Access to professional development specific to instruction for SLIFE was described as limited, with existing offerings often lacking relevance or practical application. |
| Sociocultural Barriers to optimal student participation | The impact of economic needs, cultural adjustment, and reliance on native language within peer groups was reported as slowing English acquisition and full participation in the school community. |

## Findings

Based on staff feedback from 120 responses, several challenges to effectively accelerating English language learning for SLIFE were identified:

**Inadequate Curriculum and Instructional Resources.** Staff noted that the existing curriculum is not well designed for learners with limited prior education. Materials often emphasize complex academic content rather than the foundational literacy skills in phonics, pronunciation, and functional language that are necessary for basic communication and literacy development.

**Gaps in Foundational Skills.** Due to interrupted education, many students entered the program with little to no literacy in their first language and minimal formal schooling. These gaps make it difficult for them to acquire English and keep pace with grade-level expectations, which assume instruction at grade level regardless of English proficiency.

**Unrealistic Program Duration.** The two-year program timeline was widely viewed as insufficient to address substantial learning gaps and to build the academic and linguistic skills necessary to meet grade-level standards.

**Insufficient Staffing and Support.** A shortage of qualified bilingual educators and limited professional learning opportunities, specifically designed or aligned to the needs of SLIFE, were identified as barriers to effective instruction and student progress.

**Socio-Cultural and Economic Barriers.** Staff also highlighted the effects of students' socioeconomic hardship, cultural adjustment, and the reliance on native-language peer groups as factors that can slow English acquisition and limit engagement in the school community.

# Staff Survey

## Challenges: Advancing Learning in Content Areas

Themes from responses to the open-ended question: "*What are the biggest challenges advancing the learning in content areas for SLIFE (Math, Science, Social Studies, ELA)?*"

| Challenges | Description |
|---|---|
| Pre-existing Foundational & Academic Gaps | Staff emphasized significant gaps in foundational skills and prior academic knowledge. Obviously, being SLIFE, many students arrived with minimal literacy in their first language, and few grade-level concepts, which made learning both English and academic subjects simultaneously especially difficult. |
| Unsuitable Curricula & Instructional Materials | Curricula and texts were often too linguistically demanding and not adapted to SLIFE students' needs. Teachers reported a lack of content-area curricula, leveled texts, translated materials, and visual supports. In the absence of tailored, age-appropriate curriculum, teachers relied on resources that were too advanced or inappropriate. Staff also noted the need for access to educational technology, including language-support software and bilingual digital tools. |
| Pacing, Program Structure, & Scheduling | The curriculum pace was described as overwhelming for students who were still developing basic foundational skills. Students were frequently placed into grade-level content courses before they had sufficient English proficiency, which limited their ability to participate meaningfully. Staff reported a need for more flexible scheduling, sheltered instruction, and co-teaching models. |
| Insufficient Preparation of Instructional Staff to Support SLIFE | Content area teachers reported that they felt unprepared to meet the complex needs of SLIFE students due to limited training and professional development. Staff highlighted the need for schoolwide training on strategies to support English learners and increased collaboration with ESOL specialists. In addition, a shortage of bilingual educators, paraeducators, and co-teachers reduced the ability to differentiate and provide intensive instructional support. |
| External Barriers and Inconsistent Attendance | Students frequently struggled with attendance, disengagement, and lack of confidence. Staff noted that trauma, cultural adjustment, socioeconomic pressures, and limited access to technology at home further hindered full participation participate fully in school and academic learning. |

## Findings

Based on staff feedback from 110 open-ended survey responses, several interconnected challenges were identified at both the middle and high school settings. Many of these challenges overlap with barriers to English acquisition mentioned earlier, highlighting the dual demands EMLs with interrupted education face in building language skills while accessing grade-level coursework. The primary challenges were:

- **Existing Academic Knowledge Gaps**: Staff reported students arrived with minimal first-language literacy and few grade-level concepts, which complicated the simultaneous acquisition of English and academic subjects.
- **Unsuitable Curricula & Instructional Materials**: Curricula and texts were often too linguistically demanding and poorly adapted to SLIFE needs. Instruction was often too fast, with mathematics and reading assuming prior knowledge that students lacked.
- **Limited Resources and Specialized Instructional Materials**: Age-appropriate and pre-literacy materials were insufficient to meet student needs.
- **Insufficient Preparation of Instructional Staff**: Teachers varied in preparation, with a need for more training in language acquisition and scaffolding.
- **External Barriers and Interrupted Attendance**: Student attendance, disengagement, noted that trauma, severely hindered students' ability to participate in academic learning fully.

# Staff and SLIFE Site-Level Surveys

## Illustrative Comments from Site Teams and Staff: SLIFE Program Challenges

Pacing/Program Structure/Scheduling | Unsuitable Instructional Materials | Preparation of Instructional Staff to Support SLIFE

"Scheduling and ongoing enrollment are challenging. Students arriving in late March or April are considered to be a failure on the part of the school when they exit the school year."

"The two year mark is NOT enough time. Especially with students arriving in 9th grade with very little foundational skills.... Most students need three to four years of dedicated SLIFE support."

"The biggest challenge is the lack of a coherent and specific curriculum for SLIFE students. We are left to piece together resources."

"The materials we have are for much younger students, or they assume a level of prior knowledge that our students simply don't have."

"There is inconsistent training for content teachers who receive SLIFE students after they exit the program."

"Attendance makes it difficult to have students on grade level by the end of the year."

"We lose the SLIFE marker in the student tracking system after they exit. We can't easily monitor their long-term success or track credit accumulation."

"[The] ... reading program is adapted from a program intended for younger students and is ineffective."

"The lack of training for our administrators regarding ELD systems has been a challenge."

"SLIFE Math is taught by a math teacher. We need to have ELD teachers staffing our programs."

"Our block schedule creates some challenges in students getting the amount of time needed for English and a SLIFE Math course."

"Diagnostic tools are not sensitive enough to capture the incremental growth our students make."

"The current screening exams are unrelated to the curriculum sources, WHICH are not recommended for SLIFE by the publisher."

"We desperately need more qualified co-teachers and smaller class sizes. The complexity of student needs requires more support."

"Turnover of curricula and leadership at the central level has caused an excessive amount of change from year to year. Even our philosophy on learning materials hinders optimal levels of improvement."

# Staff Survey

## Proposed Improvements to the Secondary SLIFE Program

Themes from responses to the open-ended question: "*What changes, if any, would you recommend to improve the effectiveness of the secondary SLIFE program?*"

| Proposed Change | Description | English Language Development Instruction | Content Areas |
|---|---|---|---|
| Get a Curriculum Aligned to Student Needs | Integrate foundational literacy, phonics, functional language, and sheltered strategies; focus on essential literacy rather than modified ELA. | ✅ | ✅ |
| Increase Variety of Staff and Support | Increase staff capacity by hiring additional certified teachers, reading specialists, bilingual co-teachers/mentors, and paraeducators; provide expert-led training for teachers and leaders on SLIFE needs. | ✅ | ✅ |
| Redesign Program Structure (with Extended Learning) | Implement double-period ELD courses, newcomer academies/self-contained classes; delay grade-level placement until readiness; provide after-school, weekend, and summer programs with transportation. | ✅ | ✅ |
| Strengthen Family and Community Engagement | Strengthen communication with families in their native language to involve them in student progress and support learning at home. | ✅ | ✅ |

## Findings

One hundred and three (N=103) staff members provided at least one response regarding proposed changes to the SLIFE program. On the surface, the proposed changes appear similar in targeting both English Language Development and content-area instruction, but each includes nuances specific to the focus area. Common across both areas is the emphasis on aligning instruction to student needs, expanding staff capacity, redesigning program structures, and engaging families and the community. While the proposed changes span both English Language Development (ELD) and Content Areas, each includes nuances specific to the domain.

1. **Curriculum Alignment**: Align instruction to student needs. For ELD, this emphasizes foundational literacy, phonics, functional language, and sheltered strategies, rather than modified ELA. Content Areas focus on integrating essential skills within subject instruction.
2. **Variety of Staffing and Support**: Expand staff with certified teachers, reading specialists, bilingual co-teachers/mentors, and paraeducators, along with targeted SLIFE-focused training for teachers and leaders.
3. **Program Structure Redesig**n: Implement double-period ELD courses and newcomer/self-contained classes, delay grade-level placement until readiness, and offer extended learning (after-school, weekend, summer) with transportation.
4. **Family and Community Engagement:** Strengthen communication in families' native languages to involve them in student progress and support learning at home.

# Staff Survey

## Illustrative Comments from Staff: SLIFE Program Needs and Suggested Improvements

"As a reading teacher for SLIFE, I think a second teacher/para would help to read with students, discuss vocabulary, [and] identify spelling patterns."

"One of the biggest things that would accelerate ELD development is having more time dedicated to foundational English. Double periods of ELD Seminar...."

"Based on language acquisition, the SLIFE program should be at least three years or until [achieve] an ACCESS score of 3.0 or more."

"We need to focus on their social-emotional needs and give students time to adjust to their new school environment. The first year is always a wash because ... they are stressed and overwhelmed."

"Built-in mental health check-ins to ensure their physical and emotional needs are met."

"SLIFE students need transition time and support."

"We proposed that we educate SLIFE parents and give them access to the tools they need to monitor student's performance, grades, and attendance."

"Schools don't have enough staffing to provide smaller class sizes that will accommodate SLIFE students' needs."

"General educators don't get substantial training, PDO, to help them provide meaningful instruction to the [SLIFE] students."

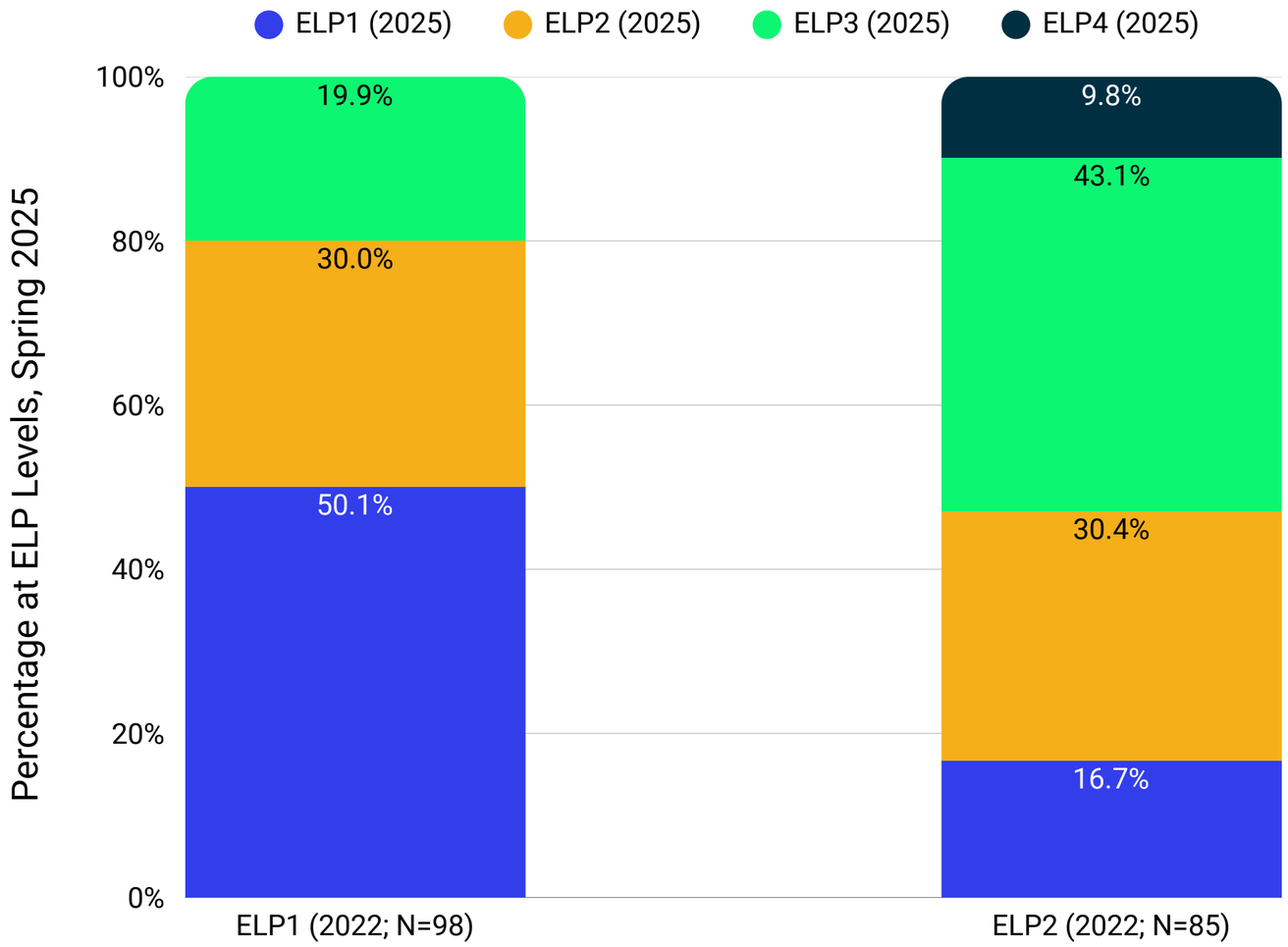
"Educating our staff. There are constant changes ... and PDOs should be mandatory around these changes."

"Understanding of SLIFE/ELD needs as a requirement for school leaders."

Program Structure and Extended Learning | Increased Socioemotional Support | Increased PLOs /Capacity to Work with SLIFE

# Growth in English Language

## Change in ELP Levels from 2022–2025




***Note.*** This chart displays students' ELP levels in 2025 among students at ELP Levels 1 and 2 in 2022. Only Students with ELP assessment levels available in 2022 and 2025 were included.

## Findings

To examine the three-year progression in English language proficiency (ELP), the analysis tracked SLIFE students who had consecutive ACCESS for M/ELLs scores in both 2022 and Spring 2025, utilizing transition matrices to map proficiency level movement.

Observed Growth Patterns. The data confirm that significant time is required for EMLs and those with interrupted schooling in particular, to progress across proficiency levels:

- **Entering Proficiency (ELP1)** group (N=98): After three years, half of this cohort (50.1%) remained at ELP1, indicating ongoing foundational skill development within the Entering band. However, a combined 46.9% demonstrated clear progression, with 30.0% advancing to ELP2 and 19.9% reaching ELP3.
- **Emerging Proficiency (ELP2) group (N=85**): This cohort showed a pattern of both progression and regression. A small group (16.7%) regressed to ELP1 (Entering), while 30.4% remained at ELP2. The largest single group, 43.1%, progressed to ELP3 (Developing) or ELP4 (9.8%).

The regression observed among students who started at ELP2 to ELP1 (16.7%) underscores the difficulty of sustaining early language gains under increasing academic demands. Remaining at the same proficiency level—or showing slight regression—often reflects ongoing, non-linear skill development rather than loss of learning. Overall, these observed patterns are consistent with extensive research indicating that older EMLs, particularly those with interrupted schooling, may require seven to ten years to achieve exit-level proficiency (WIDA, 2023; Gándara & Rumberger, 2009; Poole & Sahakyan, 2024).

# Academic Progress

## Performance on the MAP and MCAP Assessments

**2022 Grade 6 Cohort Achievement on MAP-R and MAP-M**

| Grade | Test | Year | N | Mean RIT | SD | % Met Grade Level Proficiency* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | MAP-R | 2022 | 41 | 177.6 | 14.5 | 0 |
| 7 | MAP-R | 2023 | 41 | 185.5 | 15.1 | 0 |
| 8 | MAP-R | 2024 | 41 | 198.2 | 13.0 | 0 |
| 6 | MAP-M | 2022 | 41 | 188.5 | 10.8 | 0 |
| 7 | MAP-M | 2023 | 41 | 196.1 | 14.0 | 0 |
| 8 | MAP-M | 2024 | 41 | 201.3 | 17.4 | ≤5 |

*Percentage Met Grade Level Proficiency was determined by correlating MAP RIT scores with MCAP scores (Wang, 2022).

**2022 Grade 6 Cohort Performance Levels on MCAP ELA and Math**

| Grade | Subject | N | Mean | SD | Performance Levels | | % Met Grade Level Proficiency* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | Level 1 (%) | Level 2 (%) | |
| 6 | ELA | 41 | 721.6 | 7.8 | 71.1 | 28.9 | 0 |
| 6 | Math | 41 | 714.8 | 8.2 | 85.0 | 15.0 | 0 |
| 7 | ELA | 41 | 727.2 | 8.0 | 70.7 | 29.3 | 0 |
| 7 | Math | 41 | 704.6 | 11.6 | 95.1 | 4.9 | 0 |
| 8 | ELA | 41 | 720.6 | 12.5 | 61.0 | 39.0 | 0 |
| 8 | Math | 41 | 715.1 | 12.6 | 83.3 | 16.7 | 0 |

**Note.** MCAP scores vary from 650 to 850. Level 1 ranges from 650 to 724, while Level 2 covers 725 to 749. To achieve proficiency, students need to reach Level 3 (750 to 775) or Level 4 (776 to 850) on the MCAP.

## Findings

A total of 41 students (of 56) from the 2022 SLIFE Grade 6 cohort articulated to higher grades and were consistently assessed through Grade 8, providing a longitudinal view of their academic performance.

**MAP Assessments:**

- **Literacy (MAP-R)**: Mean RIT scores increased steadily from 177.6 in Grade 6 to 185.5 in Grade 7 and 198.2 in Grade 8.
- **Mathematics (MAP-M)**: Mean RIT scores rose from 188.5 in Grade 6 to 196.1 in Grade 7 and 201.3 in Grade 8.
- Although growth was consistent across grades, the performance was not sufficient to get the students over the threshold for proficiency benchmarks aligned to MCAP.

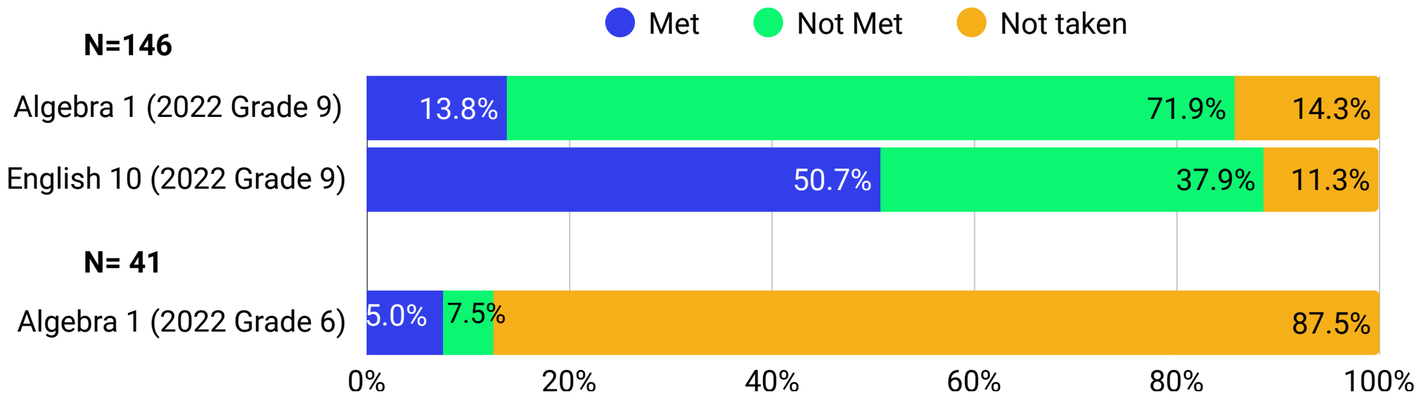
**MCAP Assessments**:

- **ELA:** Mean scores were 721.6 (Grade 6), 727.2 (Grade 7), and 720.6 (Grade 8). Across all three years, most students scored at Level 1, with 71.1% in Grade 6, 70.7% in Grade 7, and 61.0% in Grade 8.
- **Mathematics**: Mean scores were 714.8 (Grade 6), 704.6 (Grade 7), and 715.1 (Grade 8). The vast majority of students scored at Level 1—85.0% in Grade 6, 95.1% in Grade 7, and 83.3% in Grade 8.
- No students achieved a score corresponding to the grade-level proficiency (Levels 3 or 4) on either subject for the MCAP assessments.

# Academic Progress

## Progress Toward Graduation Requirements: 2022 Cohorts

**Percentage of 2022 Grade 6 and 9 Cohorts Who Met ELA10 and Algebra 1 Requirements by 2025**




**Mean Total Credits Earned Toward Graduation by 2025 Among 2022 Grade 6 (Projected for Grade 9 in 2025) and Grade 9 (Projected Grade 12) Cohorts.**

| Grade in 2022 | N | Mean | Standard Deviation | Median | Required Credits for Graduation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grade 6 | 41 | 6.7 | 2.1 | 7.0 | 22 |
| Grade 9 | 148 | 17.1 | 5.8 | 19.5 | 22 |

## Findings

Among the 146 students recorded as Grade 9 in 2022 who continued in MCPS through 2025, participation and performance on Algebra 1 and English 10 assessments were examined.

For Algebra 1, 13.8% of students both participated and met the requirements, 71.9% participated but did not meet the required score, and 14.3% had not taken the course.

For English 10, 50.7% of students participated and met the CCR required score, 37.9% participated but did not meet the required score, and 11.3% had not taken the course.

Among the 41 students in the 2022 Grade 6 cohort, only 7.5% participated and met the Algebra 1 requirement by 2025, 5.0% participated but did not meet the score, and 87.5% had not taken the course. No 2022 Grade 6 cohort students (Grade 9 in 2025) had taken English 10 yet, which is consistent with expected grade-level progression.

As of 2025, the 2022 Grade 6 cohort had earned a mean of 6.7 credits towards graduation. The 2022 Grade 9 cohort, projected to be in Grade 12 in 2025, had earned a mean of 17.1 credits. Although the data indicated that these students were accessing and completing credit-bearing courses, most of the 2022 Grade 9 students had not yet met the ELA and Algebra 1 requirements for graduation.

# Summary of Key Findings

## Implementation Across Sites

Overall, the data staff and SLIFE-site surveys indicated that the core components of the Secondary SLIFE program were in place. The instructional focus was strategically aligned to the core goals of the SLIFE program: accelerating literacy, numeracy, and English Language Development (ELD) instruction. Even with site-level variations in staffing and program organization, these core components were observable across all schools, primarily driven by staff staff holding ELD credentials and providing concerted, personalized support through counseling and paraeducator assistance.

- **SLIFE Program Focus and Component**s. As expected, nearly all sites (n=21) reported that their instructional focus placed a strong emphasis on ELD instruction, foundational literacy and numeracy, and well-being supports to help students acclimate to U.S. schools. Nearly all sites (89–91%) provided basic literacy and numeracy instruction, while two-thirds to four-fifths also offered targeted interventions in reading and mathematics. About half of the schools reported providing content-area instruction aligned with grade-level standards, although cross-cultural orientation was less frequently offered. Hardly any sites reported focusing on extended opportunities, such as study skills, summer school, credit recovery, or career pathways (0–36%). Instruction was aligned to district curricula and WIDA ELD standards, with some locations implementing Read 180 and Math 180 programs. Class sizes varied from 2 to 28 students, utilizing both SLIFE-only and co-taught models (with ELD and non-ELD teachers) in regular classes.
- **Staffing and Teacher Assignment.** Staffing was strategically assigned based on ELD certification, literacy intervention training, and experience working with EMLs with interrupted schooling. Over 90% of middle and high school staff reported they held ELD/ESOL certification, and about one-fifth were dually certified in another content area. Middle schools focused on foundational supports and socio-emotional development, while high schools emphasized specialized intervention expertise and collaboration with counselors. Paraeducators were extensively used for small-group and bilingual support, and low staff turnover contributed to program consistency and strong student-teacher relationships.
- **Instructional and Individualized Support**: Data showed that support for SLIFE students centered on individualized instruction and well-being/acculturation supports. Instruction was reported to prioritize scaffolding, curriculum adjustments, and small-group support through co-teaching and the involvement of paraeducators. High schools reported they added extra literacy and mathematics periods, while middle schools emphasized independence and family engagement. Progress monitoring of ELD goals occurred monthly or quarterly, more consistently at middle schools.
- **Supports for Well-being and Cultural Adjustment.** All sites reported they instituted supports for student well-being and acculturation, including collaboration with counselors and PCCs for family communication, counseling services through ELD/EML staff and partners, and activities to integrate students with non-SLIFE peers, such as orientation, buddy systems, and newcomer advisories. Families also received translated materials, workshops, and referrals to resources.

# Summary of Key Findings

Planning and Coordination of Instruction and Resources

- **Coordination of Instruction and Supports.** School teams reported a multidimensional, coordinated approach to addressing academic, social, and emotional needs. Family outreach was facilitated through Remind, calls, emails, and home visits, often led by PCCs and support staff. Counseling was provided by ELD/EML counselors in partnership with community organizations, while special education services were coordinated through MTSS and RTSE processes. Social integration was supported by newcomer orientation, student ambassadors, and peer groups. Families were connected to services through translated materials, workshops, and referrals. Instructional coordination was strengthened by collaboration among ELD/EML teachers, paraeducators, and counselors.
- **Typical Instructional Resources Used.** School teams and staff reported using a combination of district-provided resources and teacher-created materials to support instruction across subjects, including ELD, mathematics, ELA, science, and social studies. Middle schools focused primarily on foundational literacy and basic academic concepts, while high schools adapted existing curricula and incorporated digital tools to make grade-level content more accessible. Despite these efforts, staff consistently emphasized the absence of a centralized, SLIFE-specific curriculum, which forced teachers to independently design materials aligned with WIDA standards and students' unique learning needs. These instructional challenges were further compounded by limited staffing and professional learning opportunities related to SLIFE, making it difficult to ensure consistency and alignment across schools.
- **Instructional Planning**. Instructional planning for SLIFE was primarily led by ELD/EML teachers and specialists, working through school-based teams and district-level workgroups. These teams monitored progress, determined placements, and made exit decisions using MAP results, ACCESS for MLLs, teacher input, and individualized goals. Scheduling emphasized small intervention classes in literacy and mathematics, balanced with placement in mainstream coursework during electives.
- **Perception of Adequacy of Resources and Supports**. Staff reported mixed perceptions of the resources and supports available. Some areas were rated "just enough," or more than enough, including transportation (77.3%), access to technology (80.4%), and scheduled opportunities for language practice (54.9%). However, many supports were seen as insufficient: supplemental academic help (70.6%), professional learning (62.8%), clear school- and district-level guidelines for accelerating learning (62.2–62.0%), content resources for acceleration (67.5%), and attendance supports (65.9%). Social-emotional supports (47.4% not enough), family communication (53.7% not enough), and assessment tools (46.6% not enough) also received divided ratings, underscoring persistent challenges in both instructional and non-instructional areas.

# Summary of Key Findings

## Facilitators and Barriers to Implementation

While the data indicated that the expected programmatic structures and instructional coordination were in place, responses from staff and SLIFE site surveys also revealed persistent challenges that hindered the quality and consistency of instructional delivery and overall program implementation.

- **Successful Aspects.** Small, skill-based classes created space for tailored instruction and one-on-one support, helping students develop foundational literacy, mathematics, and language skills. Co-teaching and sheltered instruction expanded access to grade-level content while building language proficiency, enabling students to engage more fully in core subjects. Dedicated reading and phonics interventions accelerated English development, while sheltered math courses and scaffolding helped close gaps in prior knowledge and prepare students for advanced coursework. Instructional strategies such as visuals, modeling, and step-by-step guidance supported comprehension. Strong family engagement, coupled with positive teacher-student relationships, fostered trust and motivation. Technology platforms, including IXL and HMH Math 180, provided individualized practice and reinforced classroom learning.
- **Challenges to Implementation.** A notable and recurring concern was the absence of a curriculum specifically designed to meet the unique needs of SLIFE students, leaving staff to adapt existing materials that were not fully aligned. Persistent absences and staggered student enrollment further disrupted pacing and limited progress. A mismatch between available curricula and the needs of SLIFE students was frequently reported. Staff also noted that instructional resources and pre-literacy materials were often not age-appropriate or sufficiently aligned to students' learning levels. Combined with uneven staff preparation to work with SLIFE, these resource limitations highlighted the need for targeted professional development in language acquisition and scaffolding. Additionally, some students required supports beyond sheltered classes, emphasizing the importance of sustained, targeted instruction and program structures to address needs of SLIFE.
- **General Observation.** A recurring theme, which reflects limited understanding of the program in general, was the misconception among some that exiting the SLIFE program marked the end of the continued need for ELD services or intensive academic support. This highlighted the need for clearer communication about how services should follow students as they transition out of SLIFE into mainstream settings.

## Student Characteristics

Enrollment in the Secondary SLIFE program fluctuated from 624 students in 2023 to 290 in 2025, across 10 middle schools and 12 high schools, with two-thirds at the high school level. Over this period, 1,089 unique students were documented in MCPS records as having experienced interrupted schooling. The majority of the students were identified as Hispanic/Latino (91.2%), participated in FARMS (87.2%), and reported their home language as Spanish (86.5%). In the 2024–2025 academic year, 290 students with interrupted schooling were distributed across 11 middle schools and 15 high schools, three of which were not designated SLIFE sites. Site-level enrollment ranged from 1 to 14 students in middle school and from 1 to 37 in high school SLIFE sites.

# Summary of Key Findings

## Growth in English Language

Analysis of ACCESS for MLLs data from 2022 to 2025 showed that many students made progress in English language proficiency, but growth was generally insufficient to advance them to higher ELP levels. From 2022 to 2025, among the 98 students who began at ELP1, 50.0% remained at the entry level after three years, while 46.9% progressed to higher levels (27.0% to ELP2 and 19.9% to ELP3). For the 85 students who were at ELP2 in 2022, 30.4% maintained their level, and 43.1% advanced to ELP3 (30.4%) or ELP4 (9.8%) by spring 2025. This gradual growth aligns with research that indicates that older EMLs, particularly those with limited prior schooling, often require 5–7 years or extended time to attain proficiency.

## Academic Growth: 2022 Grade 6 and 9 Cohorts

The 41 students from the 2022 Grade 6 cohort were tracked through Grade 9 in 2025 and assessed using MAP and MCAP. MAP scores showed steady growth—literacy increased from 177.6 to 198.2 and mathematics from 188.5 to 201.3, yet students did not reach the MAP thresholds corresponding to grade-level proficiency. MCAP results also confirmed that most students remained at Level 1 or 2 (not proficient) in both subjects, highlighting the need for continued and targeted support.

The data on the 146 students from the Grade 9 cohort in 2022, tracked through 2025 for participation and performance in Algebra 1 and English 10, showed that about one-half (50.7%) of students had satisfied the CCR requirement for English 10. While participation in Algebra I was notably high at 71%, 13.7% of students had fulfilled the Algebra I assessment requirement. Overall, the cohort attained an average of 17.1 high school credits out of 22 needed for graduation, reflecting a positive trend in course completion.

## Student Continuity and Retention in MCPS

Continuity in MCPS varied by Grade 9 cohorts from 2022 to 2025. Analysis of Grade 9 cohorts entering MCPS between 2022 and 2025 examined enrollment continuity, withdrawals, and high school program completion through June 2025. The Class of 2025 (entered 2022; N = 216), the most advanced cohort, showed continuity and progress, with 36.6% completing high school (graduating with a diploma or certificate), 41.2% permanently exiting (withdrawn or dropped out), and 22.2% still actively enrolled in MCPS. Retention varied across the other cohorts: Class of 2028 (entered 2025) retained 94.0% of students, Class of 2027 (entered 2024) retained 61.6%, Class of 2026 (entered 2023) retained 41.4%. Across these Grade 9 cohorts, most students who exited, did so in Grades 9 or 10, with recorded withdraw codes including disengagement (62.0%), lack of motivation (27.3%), or other personal circumstances.

# Recommendations

These recommendations are drawn from study findings and research-based best practices.

## 1 Redesign the SLIFE Program Structure

A review of the MCPS SLIFE program, compared with similar models in New York City, Boston, Minnesota, and Massachusetts DESE, confirmed alignment with most best practices, including dual-criteria identification, foundational literacy instruction, and integrated socio-emotional support; with two notable exceptions: the absence of an explicit, evidence-based curriculum and a system for monitoring student growth that captures granular, incremental gains in academic and language skills (Appendix A; Browder, 2022; WIDA, 2015). Staff surveys corroborated this and further indicated that the duration of the SLIFE program was insufficient to accelerate learning for SLIFE before they transitioned to mainstream classes with non-SLIFE peers, even with continued ELD services. These data also consistently highlighted the unique triple challenge faced by SLIFE: developing English proficiency, developing foundational literacy and numeracy skills, and mastering grade-level content. Indeed, research further shows that SLIFE experience the slowest rates of language and literacy development (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2022; DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). Additionally, about one-third of Grade 9 cohorts (2022–2024) left MCPS by Grades 9 or 10, highlighting the need for a reconfigured program better to support student adjustment, integration, and academic success.

The findings from this study underscore the need for a decisive reconfiguration of program components. The redesigned model would more clearly articulate the function of the SLIFE program as an accelerated, transitional pathway, condensing essential learning, establishing a strong academic and linguistic foundation, and helping students adjust to U.S. schooling. Defining clear goals and expectations across the system is crucial for coherence and accountability among the wide range of stakeholders. The expectation is that the redesigned SLIFE program framework would clearly communicate its alignment with the ELD framework, the MCPS strategic plan, and the *Blueprint for Maryland's* Future, while outlining approaches to provide sustained academic and linguistic support for students with interrupted schooling, promoting academic progress, successful integration, and continuity in MCPS.

Recommended Actions:

1. Clarify and communicate the goals and expected results from the SLIFE program: Specifically, 1) Define SLIFE as a transitional and accelerated phase/stage, distinct yet synergistic with ongoing ELD services, and 2) Communicate with all stakeholders the role of the SLIFE program in a student's educational journey, including success measures and post-SLIFE program support that would be needed.
2. Convene teachers, administrators, and central staff to review and redesign the SLIFE program structure.
    a. Reassess the two-year mandatory SLIFE program completion rule and implement flexible, skill-based criteria.
    b. Align staffing, scheduling, and resources to maintain small-class settings, bilingual co-support, support through EML transition counselors and parent community coordinators, and collaboration between ELD staff and staff in the content areas to sustain individualized instruction.
    c. Establish clear, district-wide protocols for post-program monitoring for specified amount of time after their exit from the specialized program.
3. Develop and implement structured credit recovery pathways, summer programs, and extended learning opportunities specifically designed to support SLIFE in their academic progress and credit attainment.

# Recommendations

## 2 Implement a Research Based Curriculum and Resources Aligned with the Instructional Needs of SLIFE

Staff consistently reported that existing instructional resources are fragmented, age-inappropriate, and poorly aligned with SLIFE students' needs. They also noted the lack of tools capable of detecting small, incremental changes in learning or showing how those changes align with expected performance benchmarks. As a result, teachers rely on districtwide or quarterly assessments designed for general populations, which do not capture nuanced progress. Implementing a curriculum designed for older EMLs would accelerate foundational skill development and strengthen alignment with CCR goals. Accessible, technology-enabled materials would enhance instructional delivery, while progress monitoring tools would enable educators to track growth in real time. Best practices call for skill-based monitoring of incremental growth in academic skills and instructional practices that incorporate constant formative checks and provide multiple, low-stakes opportunities for students to demonstrate understanding (WIDA, 2015; Browder et al., 2022; Appendix A).

Recommended Actions:

1. Develop or procure research-based materials in literacy, mathematics, and content areas that are age-appropriate and designed for SLIFE learners.
    a. Ensure usability across instructional roles by providing resources and scaffolds accessible to both ELD and content teachers, including adaptive, technology-enabled tools (e.g., multilingual supports, speech-to-text).
    b. Integrate self-paced, technology-based learning tools within the curriculum to support independent practice and differentiated instruction.
2. Establish centralized progress monitoring systems with standardized, skill-based benchmarks in literacy, numeracy, and functional language. These systems will capture incremental growth and guide instruction.

## 3 Strengthen Staffing and Professional Development

Staff reported that guidelines from DME regarding accelerating instruction and compacting learning were insufficient to support instruction for SLIFE, underscoring the need for structured Professional Learning Opportunities (PLOs) and cross-site collaboration. Targeted professional development, smaller class sizes, and increased bilingual support were consistently identified as needed improvements to the program. Providing ongoing, cross-disciplinary PLOs and collaborative structures will enable teachers to deliver instruction consistently, scaffold learning effectively, and support measurable gains in literacy, numeracy, and content knowledge.

Recommended Actions:

1. Offer mandatory cross-disciplinary professional development to ensure all staff are familiar with the program goals and instructional strategies.
2. Offer PLO and train ELD staff on the newly instituted curriculum and associated language acquisition strategies.
3. Train content teachers on scaffolding and sheltered instruction for EMLs with interrupted schooling.
4. Train PCC, EML counselors and administrators on the program's goals, scheduling, mitigating withdrawals, and strategies to increase student engagement.

# Recommendations

## 4 Retain Interrupted Schooling Data Element in Student Records

Data on student continuity in MCPS show that many SLIFE high school students leave before completing high school, with over half exiting in some years and about one-third of Grade 9 students leaving by Grade 10. A key factor cited by staff is the removal of the SLIFE designation once students exit the program, which merges their records into the general EML population and obscures their educational histories. This limits the ability to follow up, monitor progress, and provide consistent support. From an evaluation standpoint, relying on historical, time-stamped records from multiple sources is inefficient and prone to error, especially given the frequency of school transfers and address changes. Research also indicates that such a data element would strengthen district-wide accountability and guide program improvement and resource allocation, ensuring that staffing, interventions, and supports are better aligned with any ongoing needs of SLIFE. Establishing a permanent SLIFE data element in the student record system would facilitate:

1. Accurate Differentiation of SLIFE in Student Records: Clearly identify SLIFE within the EML population.
2. Cohort-Level Monitoring and Accountability: This approach would also facilitate cohort-level data analysis, providing a longitudinal, outcome-focused view that moves beyond single-year snapshots. It would allow DME and schools to track student progress, monitor retention, and assess the program's impact on academic acceleration and achievement over time.
3. Informed Resource Allocation: Facilitate targeted program improvements and align staffing, interventions, and other resources to meet the unique needs of SLIFE throughout their time in MCPS.

Recommended Actions:

- **Establish a Permanent SLIFE Data Marker**: Work with the Department of Student Data Systems to create a permanent “SLIFE” data element that remains linked to each student throughout their MCPS enrollment. This will ensure accurate identification, longitudinal tracking, and continuity of support for SLIFE students across schools and years.
- **Centralize and Archive SLIFE Program Data:** Enhance the student record system to capture and archive key SLIFE program information, including program entry and exit dates, instructional track (1–10 or 11–20 months), program duration, and exit criteria, in a centralized and permanent database. This will enhance data accuracy, minimize duplication, and facilitate long-term analysis of student progress and program impact.
- **Expand Data Access and Build Staff Capacity:** Provide district and school-based staff, including administrators, counselors, and EML/SLIFE teachers, with appropriate access to the centralized SLIFE data system. Accompany access with training to strengthen data literacy, ensure consistent use of SLIFE information, and promote coordinated, data-informed decisions to support student success.

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# Appendix A: Document Review

## Overview of Programs for SLIFE: MCPS and Peer Districts*

| Component | MCPS | Massachusetts DESE | Minnesota MDE | BPS | NYC DOE (SIFE) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Identification Criteria** | WIDA ≤ 2, ≥ 2-year schooling gap, Grades 6-12, ≥ 2 years behind grade level in L1 literacy/Mathematics | ELs ≥ 2 years below peers, SLIFE Pre-Screener, Educational Background Review | ≥ 2 years behind age-appropriate grade level, L1 assessment | ELD Levels 1-2, ≥ 2 years behind grade level, interrupted schooling | ELs <12 months in US schools, ≥ 2 years behind grade level in L1 literacy/academic skills |
| **Instructional Focus** | Literacy, English Language Development (ELD), Math/Social Studies language, mainstream electives | Self-contained literacy/numeracy, content-based language integration | Foundational literacy, numeracy, academic language | HILT, literacy/numeracy, some L1 support | Stand-alone ENL classes, Bridges curriculum SDL |
| **Specific Curricula** | Adapted ELD curriculum | ESL Model Curriculum Units (MCUs) with pacing modifications | Locally implemented targeted curricula | HILT | Bridges to Academic Success |
| **Progress Tracking / Assessment Tools** | General district-wide assessments or quarterly grading | SLIFE Success Portfolio, Checkpoints, Progress Monitoring Forms | Best practices encouraged; not specified | iReady (Curriculum Associates), NWEA MAP, BPS Interim Assessments | Multilingual Literacy Screener (MLS) |
| **Social-Emotional Support** | Emergent Multilingual Therapeutic Counselors (ETC), acculturation support | Wraparound services aligned to SEL competencies | Key component in national best practices | Extended learning (before/after/summer school) | Integrated in Bridges curriculum, newcomer academies |

*his section synthesizes the document review conducted on the Secondary SLIFE Program and analyzes program models from peer districts and states (NYC DOE, BPS, Massachusetts DESE, and Minnesota MDE) to establish best practices and identify programmatic gaps. L1: First language or native language, HILT: High-Intensity Literacy Training (BPS program). SEL: Socioemotional learning, HILT: High Intensity Literacy Training (BPS), ENL: English as a New Language, SDL: Students with Developing Literacy.

**Findings**

The document review of four SLIFE/SIFE programs—MCPS, NYC DOE, BPS, and Massachusetts DESE—revealed three key shared features. First, these programs use a dual-criteria identification process, requiring both low English proficiency (typically WIDA Level 1 or 2) and a significant schooling gap (two or more years behind peers in literacy or academic skills, or a two-year interruption in formal education). Second, programs prioritize foundational instruction and literacy, providing intensive, explicit teaching in literacy, numeracy, and academic language, often through self-contained classes or dedicated programs that prepare students to access mainstream content. Third, all programs integrate socio-emotional support, embedding Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and wraparound services, often through dedicated staff or extended programming, to help students adjust to the academic and social demands that follow trauma, displacement, or challenges to adjusting in a new culture and US schools.

# Appendix A: Document Review

## Unique Programmatic Approaches and Gaps Based on Best Practices

While the goals for the programs for SLIFE are consistent, each district/state employs unique implementation models, administrative tools, and curricular resources.

**Unique Programmatic Approaches**

The most notable differences appear in the specific tools and models used for instruction and monitoring:

- **NYC DOE (SLIFE):** Employs the highly specialized Bridges to Academic Success curriculum, explicitly designed for the Students with Developing Literacy (SDL) subgroup. Their specialized diagnostic tool is the Multilingual Literacy Screener (MLS), which provides precise data on native language literacy to drive instruction.
- **Boston Public Schools (BPS)**: Implements the High Intensity Literacy Training (HILT) model and relies heavily on commercial, standardized assessment and blended learning platforms like Curriculum Associates iReady and NWEA MAP for assessment and progress tracking.
- **Massachusetts DESE**: Provides state-level administrative tools, including the SLIFE Success Portfolio and the SLIFE District Self-Assessment Tool, and recommends ESL Model Curriculum Units (MCUs).
- **Minnesota MDE**: Emphasizes native language (L1) assessments but offers less detailed public guidance on specific curriculum implementation.

Variations in Program Structures and Support Staff include (No Information was available on Minnesota and Massachusetts DESE--therefore, they were not compared):

- **MCPS:** Maintains a 15:1 student-to-teacher ratio and utilizes **Parent Community Coordinators (PCCs)** and **Emergent Multilingual Therapeutic Counselors (ETC)**.
- **NYC DOE:** Uses the SLIFE designation with structured newcomer academies and specialized staff.
- **BPS:** Offers extended learning opportunities, with SEL integrated within HILT and assessment frameworks.

**Programmatic Gaps Based on Best Practices Literature**

Analysis of publicly available resources against best practices (WIDA, 2015; Browder et al., 2022) revealed two primary gaps:

1. Lack of Specified Core Curriculum. While NYC DOE and BPS identify specific curricula, other programs often do not publicly specify the instructional materials used for explicit literacy and numeracy. Research indicates that SLIFE benefits most from high-quality, evidence-based curricula. When districts or programs do not specify what they use, it limits the assessment of program fidelity and effectiveness.
2. Inconsistent, Granular Progress Tracking (Accountability). Progress monitoring across programs varies in specificity and rigor:
    - Some programs use specialized diagnostic tools (e.g., NYC DOE's MLS; BPS's iReady).
3. Others rely primarily on general district-wide assessments or quarterly grading. Best practices emphasize granular, skill-based monitoring to capture incremental literacy gains in students. Programs that rely solely on general assessments may fail to detect the targeted progress essential for this subgroup (WIDA, 2015; Massachusetts DESE, n.d.).

L1: First language or native language, HILT: High-Intensity Literacy Training (BPS program). L1: First language or native language, HILT: High Intensity Literacy Training (BPS), ENL: English as a New Language, SDL: Students with Developing Literacy.