

INFORMATION BULLETIN

TO: All Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Funded Alameda County
Workforce Development Board Service Providers

DATE: September 23, 2026

SUBJ: **Commercial Driver's Licenses for English Language Learners: Federal
Requirements**

PURPOSE OF BULLETIN:

This purpose of this bulletin is to inform workforce service program staff of the federal guidelines regulating whether English Language Learners are eligible to hold Commercial Driver's Licenses or Commercial Learner's Permits within the United States.

CITATIONS:

- State of California Employment Development Department (EDD) Workforce Services Information Notice (WSIN) 26-06 – Workforce Training to Obtain a Commercial Driver's License, Issued August 4, 2026
- US Department of Labor (DOL) Training and Employment Notice (TEN) 01-26 – Public Workforce Training for Acquisition of a Commercial Driver's License (CDL)
- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) section 134(c)(3)(A) and 20 C.F.R. 680.210
- Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations, 49 CFR § 391.11(b)(2)
- Executive Order 14286, Enforcing Commonsense Rules of the Road for America's Truck Drivers, April 28, 2025
- Minimum Job Requirements for the Operation of Commercial Motor Vehicles, published by the Employment and Training Administration's Office of Foreign Labor Certification, May 14, 2026

SUMMARY:

This Information Bulletin (IB) contains important considerations for the public workforce system when assisting English Language Learners seeking employment and training in careers requiring a Commercial Driver's License (CDL).

BACKGROUND:

English language proficiency remains a key component of the CDL determination of eligibility at the federal governance level and through each stage, from training enrollment to testing to on-road operation. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), the primary federal agency governing commercial driving, mandates English proficiency as a condition of CDL eligibility.

Under 49 CFR § 391.11(b)(2), a driver must be able to:

- Read and speak English sufficiently to converse with the general public
- Understand highway traffic signs and signals written in English
- Respond to official inquiries (e.g., from law enforcement or inspectors)
- Make entries on reports and records required by federal regulations.

This is an absolute federal requirement that applies within all states and cannot be waived at the state level for interstate commerce. If a driver is found to be in violation of 49 CFR § 391.11(b)(2), a citation and placement into “out-of-service” status will follow.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PUBLIC WORKFORCE SYSTEMS:

Demand for workers with CDLs remains steady, and careers in truck driving are a popular choice among job seekers. The majority of CDL training programs – whether conducted by community colleges, truck driving schools, or carrier sponsored schools require the trainee to possess basic English literacy before enrollment. The written curriculum, manuals, and tests should be written and administered in English.

Given the federal mandate for English language proficiency to successfully obtain a CDL, public workforce system staff should take immediate steps to effectively assist job seekers that want to pursue a career requiring a CDL. As required under WIOA section 134(c)(3)(A) and 20 C.F.R. 680.210, training services through the adult and dislocated worker programs may only be provided to individuals that “have the skills and qualifications to participate successfully in training services”.

The following actions should be taken to ensure English Language Learner candidates will succeed in CDL training programs:

- Conduct initial interviews with interested candidates seeking a CDL to accurately assess any existing language barriers and ensure other requirements for licensure are met.
- Use valid assessments of skills and English language proficiency through interviews. This step can inform the decision for enrollment (or non-enrollment) in CDL training.
- Determine the potential for co-enrollment in the WIOA Title II Adult Education program for participants seeking a CDL who need English language education.
- Use integrated education and training (IET) approaches, wherever possible as a method to integrate programs and funding and strengthen career pathway programs.

An IET approach provides adult education and literacy concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster. An IET program includes the following three components:

- Adult education and literacy activities
- Workforce preparation activities; and
- Workforce or occupational skills training

The U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education has developed a toolkit that can prove useful in the development or review of an IET program. The toolkit can be located on the Literacy Information and Communication System’s (LINCS) [website](#).

As best practices for English language acquisition for CDL contexts training programs should:

- Heavily weight oral communication, listening comprehension, and pronunciation of safety-critical terms, because much of the CDL English requirement is spoken (conversing with the public, and responding to inspectors about loading, tie down, weight distribution, how different materials affect braking and turning, etc.).
- Develop or adopt English second language curricula specifically built around trucking and transportation vocabulary. This includes regulatory and safety terminology, HAZMAT placard reading and emergency response language, and communication with dispatchers, shippers, receivers, and law enforcement.
- Establish explicit, written proficiency benchmarks, including such details as vocabulary and fluency, mapped to the federal regulatory standards—not vague thresholds—so that both instructors and learners have a clear target.

Education and workforce partners should not lower the bar, but invest in the ramp up, (e.g., pretraining language acquisition, bridge programs, and integrated instruction), so learners can meet federal requirements before they are licensed and operate commercially. Licensing someone who cannot meet federal requirements exposes them, the public, and the training provider to significant risk.

ENTRY-LEVEL DRIVER TRAINING REGULATIONS:

FMCSA’s Entry-Level Driver Training (ELDT) regulations set the baseline for training requirements for entry-level drivers. These standards apply to any individual seeking to:

- Obtain a Class A or Class B CDL for the first time;
- Upgrade an existing Class B CDL to a Class A CDL; or
- Obtain a school bus (S), passenger (P), or hazardous materials (H) endorsement for the first time.

The ELDT regulations are not retroactive; individuals who were issued a CDL or an S, P, or H endorsement prior to February 7, 2022, are not required to complete training for the respective CDL or endorsement.

If an applicant obtained a Commercial Learner’s Permit (CLP) prior to February 7, 2022, and obtains a Commercial Driver’s License before the CLP or renewed CLP expires, the applicant is not subject to the ELDT requirements.

Any individual who meets one of the exceptions for taking a skills test in [49 CFR Part 383](#) is also exempt from the ELDT requirements.

About the Training Provider Registry

The FMCSA Training Provider Registry retains a record of which CDL applicants have completed the new training and certification process outlined in the ELDT regulations.

For more information about the ELDT regulations and the Training Provider registry, visit <https://tpr.fmcsa.dot.gov>.

The ELDT regulations and the Training Provider Registry were mandated under the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21). The ELDT final rule was based, in part, on consensus recommendations from the Agency's ELDT Advisory Committee, a negotiated rulemaking committee that held a series of meetings in 2015.

ACTION:

All workforce service providers must ensure that individuals seeking training for or an occupation requiring CDLs are prepared to meet all of that occupation's licensing requirements, including language requirements.

Any discrepancies arising between this policy/procedure and federal or state provisions (due to future revisions) will default to the current minimum federal and state regulations and guidance available – until such time that this policy can be updated. Updated information and bulletins may be found on the Alameda County Workforce Development Board's website (www.acwdb.org)

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