

## Key Principles for ELL Instruction <sup>(v6)</sup>

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English Language Arts and Mathematics as well as the soon-to-be released Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) require that all students including ELLs meet rigorous grade-level standards. The following principles are meant to guide teachers, coaches, ELL specialists, curriculum leaders, principals, and district administrators as they work together to develop methods and materials to help ELLs meet these new Standards. These principles hold true for the diverse instructional models employed in-service of ELLs such as dual immersion, bilingual education, English as a Second Language (ESL), general education classrooms, and special education classrooms. Teachers of ELLs encompass a range of teachers from content area teachers, English as Second Language teachers and bilingual teachers.

These principles are based on papers and discussions from a January 2012 conference at Stanford University. The principles draw from theory, research, and professional knowledge related to the education of ELLs. In developing these principles, the *Understanding Language* District Engagement Subcommittee drew directly from the papers presented at the conference along with work done by others in this field. These principles also explicitly reference the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects, the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics, and A Framework for K-12 Science Education: practices, cross-cutting concepts, and core ideas.

**Principle 1:** Instruction leverages ELLs' native language(s) and culture.

**Principle 2:** Instruction develops discipline-specific language along with discipline-specific knowledge and competencies.

**Principle 3:** Instruction is standards-aligned and grade level appropriate.

**Principle 4:** Instruction addresses the needs of students with various levels of English proficiency and with a variety of prior school experiences.

**Principle 5:** Instruction provides the necessary support to ensure that ELLs comprehend disciplinary texts and tasks. This will enable students to acquire the language and knowledge they need to become more independent learners.

**Principle 6:** Diagnostic and formative assessments are used to identify students' knowledge and academic language competencies to guide instructional practice.

# Teacher Actions

Each principle charges educators with classroom, school or district responsibilities to examine their practices and understand what must be in place to maximize ELLs' access to and success with these new standards that prepare ELLs for college and careers. The set of principles can be used to initiate discussions among practitioners who share similar roles and responsibilities or have unique responsibilities. What immediately follow are descriptions of some of the implications for teachers in the classroom.

**Principle 1: Instruction leverages ELLs' native language(s) and culture.** *ELLs' native language(s) and culture are regarded as assets and are used by the teacher in bridging prior knowledge to new knowledge, and in making content meaningful and comprehensible.*

1. Teachers value students' native language (s) and use it as an entry point when and where needed, regardless of whether or not the teacher speaks students' native language.
2. Instruction draws on students' native language(s) to help make content delivered in a second language comprehensible.
3. Instructional materials in ELLs' native languages are available for students to access grade level content.
4. Teachers employ flexible and fluid grouping structures, both homogeneous and heterogeneous, to work with ELLs based on English Language proficiency, native language, and level of background knowledge. For example, students are grouped by native language to advantage their prior knowledge for comprehension and to access prior understandings and skills.
5. Teachers encourage explicit instruction of the characteristics of disciplinary discourse in native language and English to accelerate language transfer. For further discussion about language transfer, go to the National Literacy Panel Report<sup>1</sup> on Language Minority Children and Youth.

**Principle 2: Instruction develops discipline-specific language along with discipline-specific knowledge.** *Classroom practice facilitates the development of discipline-specific language competencies to help students integrate their language development with the conceptual understandings they are acquiring within different disciplines.*

1. Teachers develop a deep knowledge of the disciplinary vocabulary, language functions, and discourse that ELLs need and structure multiple opportunities in the classroom for students to use language.
2. Teachers explicitly discuss the characteristics of texts, language functions, and discourse in the discipline with students.
3. Teachers provide opportunities for students to engage in linguistically complex and content-rich tasks, including negotiating meaning in disciplinary discourse.
4. Instruction is designed with attention to language functions and progressions, and grows ELLs' competencies with discipline-specific language functions such as obtaining information, demonstrating understanding, constructing explanations, engaging in arguments, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth (2006), <http://www.cal.org/projects/archive/natlitpanel.html>

**Principle 3: Instruction is standards-aligned and grade level appropriate.** *Instruction is guided by the new Standards and includes: opportunities for students to engage in oral and written discourse in which they present explanations, make conjectures, justify conclusions, and argue from evidence across all disciplines. The new Standards provide greater opportunities for students to engage in more linguistically complex and content-rich tasks, including negotiating meaning in disciplinary discourse.*

1. Classroom practice is cognitively challenging and aligned to grade-level Common Core State Standards for mathematics and English language arts as well as Next Generation Science Standards.
2. Instruction is designed to engage students in productive struggle as students build content knowledge and develop rich discipline-specific language and discourse.
3. Students engage in oral and written discourse in which they argue from evidence, present explanations, make conjectures, justify conclusions and validate findings.
4. The design of instructional tasks includes scaffolds for ELLs that do not diminish their engagement with complex concepts and text.

**Principle 4: Instruction addresses the needs of students with various levels of English proficiency with a variety of prior school experiences.** *Instruction moves students forward by meeting them where they are and facilitating access to rigorous disciplinary language and content standards.*

1. Teachers review and use data (nativity, prior schooling, native language and English proficiency, etc.) when planning instruction for individual student needs.
2. Teachers are highly skilled and intentional about the use of scaffolds so that students experience rigor and struggle productively.
3. Teachers employ flexible and fluid grouping structures, both homogeneous and heterogeneous, to work with ELLs based on English language proficiency, literacies and level of background knowledge.
4. Teachers choose materials based on native language and English proficiency levels that are appropriate for the grade span when planning individual and group learning experiences that accelerate their development.
5. Teachers communicate with families to gather a social history in order to gain a better understanding of student needs (academic and socio-emotional).
6. Teachers meet regularly with colleagues to reflect and co-plan instruction that accelerate competencies, content and English language proficiency.
7. Teachers use interventions and instructional routines to hone in on specific precursor competencies and knowledge that a subset of students might be lacking.
8. All classroom libraries contain age-, grade-, and content-appropriate books and materials in English and the students' native languages.

**Principle 5: Instruction provides the necessary support to ensure that ELLs comprehend disciplinary texts and tasks. This will enable students to acquire the language and knowledge they need to become more independent learners. *ELLs engage with authentic complex texts and tasks across the disciplines aligned to the new Standards. Supports help ELLs negotiate meaning and build their capacity to acquire and apply complex disciplinary language structures with confidence.***

1. Teachers are masterful and intentional about the use of scaffolds enabling students to work beyond their current ability with appropriate support, for instance: use of anchor models techniques, graphic organizers, visual representations, and structured peer interactions.
2. Teachers understand that scaffolds are temporary supports that must be used with students only when needed as they move towards independent levels of performance.
3. Teachers carefully choose a variety of materials for individual, small group and whole class learning experiences so that students are often working at their current reading levels and beyond with appropriate supports from teachers and peers.
4. Teachers provide a variety of complex texts that challenge students to build and expand their current literacy, language and content knowledge.
5. Teachers collect evidence of students' progression towards independence, adjusting instruction when necessary.
6. Teachers provide students with frequent exposure to the variety of writing genres with appropriate supports when needed.
7. Teachers communicate clearly to students the academic expectations of the classroom (i.e. goals, objectives, rationale), ultimately strengthening students' metacognitive abilities.
8. Teachers design and use scaffolds that afford ELLs an entry point leading to a productive struggle with content and language development.

**Principle 6: Diagnostic and formative assessments are used to identify students' knowledge and academic language competencies to guide instructional practice. *These assessment practices allow teachers to monitor students' in the moment learning and to adjust instruction accordingly; provide students with timely and useful feedback; and encourage students to reflect on their own learning and thinking. Teachers monitor students' in the moment as well as on-going learning, and adjust instruction accordingly.***

1. Teachers provide students with timely and useful feedback; and encourage students to reflect on their own learning and thinking.
2. Teachers design assessments with discipline-specific language competencies in mind.
3. Teachers adapt assessments linguistically so that ELLs show their conceptual understanding.
4. Teachers help students learn the specific linguistic features of formative and summative assessments.
5. Teachers analyze texts and tasks for discipline-specific language and content demands.

As illustrated above, each principle calls for specific classroom actions from teachers as they enact practices for English Language Learners' success. Teachers with expertise in English language development and bilingual education must partner with those with subject-specific expertise to address the needs of ELLs. The new Standards call for significant levels of meaning making between students and among students of diverse levels of English proficiencies. Teachers will need to learn how to set-up collaborative structures and design tasks that draw students into academic discussion regularly. In addition, the principles require school

leaders/administrators and districts to carefully address the needs of ELLs when designing the infrastructure and supports that will help maximize ELL accomplishment of the new Standards.

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# Leadership Actions

What follow are descriptions of overarching considerations for school leaders/administrators and district leaders. This is an opportunity for leaders to examine practices and evaluate their impact on ELL attainment. The new Standards pose new and significant demands for ELLs and will require that districts establish new practices to meet them.

## School Leaders & Administrators

### Vision for ELLs: Responsive and Rigorous Instruction and Curriculum

1. School leaders carry out the district's vision for ELLs, and have clear and high expectations for all ELLs.
2. School leaders provide socio-emotional supports to students who have experienced or are experiencing turmoil as a result of their immigration and/or reunification circumstances.
3. School leaders implement the district's ELL Response To Intervention (RTI) model.

### Resource & Funding

1. School leaders must ensure that ELLs have access to standards aligned curriculum.
2. School leaders make sure rich grade-level appropriate materials and technology resources are available for students in all disciplines in the native languages and English at all proficiency levels.

### Human Capital & Professional Development

1. School leaders facilitate professional learning communities that examine ELLs' work and tasks for evidence of alignment to grade-level cognitive and academic language demands.
2. School leaders ensure that teachers of ELLs receive professional development on discipline-specific language and literacies development and have time to co-construct lessons and units that integrate content and language development.
3. School leaders ensure that teachers of ELLs receive professional development on discipline-specific language and literacies development and have time to assess content knowledge.
4. School leaders provide professional development on ways to differentiate instruction for subgroups of ELLs (newcomers, SIFE, Long-term ELLs, ELLs with IEPs, etc.).
5. School leaders provide all teachers of ELLs the time to develop their expertise in meeting the needs of ELLs.

### School Environment Supportive of Quality Instruction and Fidelity of Implementation

1. School leaders provide time for ESL/bilingual teachers and content area teachers to collaborate on understanding the cognitive demands and discipline-specific language challenges of curriculum, instruction, and assessments.
2. School leaders facilitate the creation of detailed ELL case studies enabling the school community to have a common understanding of ELLs' academic and socio-emotional needs.
3. School leaders design and provide structures and time for common planning so that all teachers share the responsibility of educating students in content and skills.
4. School leaders create a culture where teachers are afforded the time to differentiate for language and content, bridging the gap that ELLs may have from their monolingual peers.

5. School leaders create and structure professional development, inquiry team work, and common planning time which use the available data around student literacy and content area achievement to drive curriculum and lesson development.

### **Data Used to Diagnose and Inform**

1. School leaders collect data (i.e. nativity, proficiency levels, years of services, home language, prior schooling) to inform culturally relevant curriculum and instructional practices.
2. School leaders establish an intake process so that data can be obtained from students and their families.
3. School leaders disseminate and analyze relevant data with all teachers to inform and guide classroom practice.
4. School leaders create profiles of different types of ELLs to inform the overall professional development plan and areas of focus.
5. School leaders seek observable evidence of the discipline in practice, and are able to articulate means for improving implementation when teachers need support.
6. School leaders acknowledge teachers who have expertise and showcase, as well as encourage their knowledge for others to learn from within the school.
7. School leaders ensure that ELLs are assessed in fair and equitable ways. Assessments should test content knowledge. This means that at times, testing in the native language may be appropriate.

### **District Leaders**

#### **Vision for ELLs: Responsive and Rigorous Instruction and Curriculum**

1. District creates and holds an instructional vision for ELLs that is equal to that which they have for other students.
2. District prioritizes socio-emotional supports for ELLs along with an emphasis on rigorous academic instruction.
3. District develops a system-wide model for Response To Intervention (RTI) specifically for ELLs.
4. Resource & Funding
5. Curriculum guides integrate content and discipline-specific language competencies and literacies development in their scope and sequence, sample lessons, and units.
6. District intentionally sets aside funds in support of making this vision a reality.
7. District invests in appropriate assessments and instructional resources in English and students' native languages.
8. District adopts and purchases a variety of high quality, age- and grade-appropriate materials that support rigorous instruction in all content areas in English and the students' native languages.
9. District secures instructional material to support content instruction in the native languages; district develops these instructional materials if existing materials are not available.

#### **Human Capital & Professional Development**

1. Districts design professional learning series that bring ESL/bilingual teachers, content area teachers and principals together for learning and inquiry experiences that build their capacity to educate ELLs to grade level standards.
2. District ensures that site based professional development provides time and structures for all teachers of ELLs to learn from each other and plan instruction for ELLs.
3. District funds, protects and schedules time for ESL teachers and content area teachers to collaborate on lesson design, co-teach, evaluate and refine units of instruction.

4. District builds the educators' capacity to understand that ELLs are not a monolithic group, recognizing their diversity of language, culture, prior schooling, etc. This diversity should be considered when making decisions at the district, school and classroom level.
5. District and schools' professional development is informed by the latest research and evidenced based practices on ELL instruction.
6. District recruits, hires, and develops highly qualified administrators and teachers with ELL expertise.
7. District provides professional development to educators at all levels within the district to enhance their expertise to work with ELLs.
8. District ensures that bilingual teachers have professional learning opportunities designed to enrich their content and discipline-specific language and literacy fluency in the native languages.

### **District Environment Supportive of Quality Instruction and Fidelity of Implementation**

1. District evaluation tools, protocols and processes for all teachers and administrators integrate content and academic language and literacies.
2. District builds a culture of collaborative inquiry through professional learning plans that bring a focus to ELL subgroups and help build capacity for quality teaching.
3. District departments work cross-functionally within the system's given structures to ensure that all ELLs' needs are met.
4. District creates structures and processes for the evaluation of bilingual classroom aligned to standards to include grade level content and language development as well as transference to English.

### **Data Used to Diagnose and Inform**

1. District invests, creates and provides robust data collection and reporting systems around student literacy and content area achievement.
2. District formative and benchmark assessments integrate content and discipline-specific language competencies and literacies development. Educators learn how to examine student work for content and language demands as well as knowledge and language production.
3. District creates structures and systems that enable schools to access and analyze data relevant to ELL student performance and progress.
4. District identifies or creates tools to observe evidence of the rigorous content and discipline-specific discourse in practice, and has clear and comprehensive means for improving implementation when schools need support.
5. District acknowledges administrators and teachers who have expertise and showcases their knowledge for others to learn from within the district.
6. District secures or creates benchmarks and tools to evaluate progress towards successful implementation of ELL programs and makes adjustments along the way as necessary.
7. District supports and facilitates group of educators engaged in curriculum and formative assessments development for bilingual classrooms.
8. District personnel help teachers learn the specific linguistic features of formative and summative assessments
9. District establishes a process of intake so that baseline assessments in the native language and English Language proficiency can be obtained from students and education histories can be documented.



**For more information on Understanding Language:**

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