Supporting High-Quality Instruction for English Learners in Onsite, Hybrid, and Remote Learning Environments

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This resource draws on a resource created by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) that is based on guidance compiled from state education agencies, national organizations, and the U.S. Department of Education.

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Numerous studies and reports recommend evidence-based instructional practices that have been shown to support English Learner (EL) students' classroom engagement, language development, and academic achievement. These practices take EL students' home circumstances and language proficiency into account; afford EL students opportunities to engage in discipline-specific practices that leverage their home language(s), cultural assets, and prior knowledge; and leverage formative assessment practices to monitor the students' learning and support their autonomy.

Evidence-based instructional practices for ELs, as synthesized in the 2017 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) report, *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English*:
- leverage home language, knowledge, and cultural assets
- integrate grade-level content, analytical practices, and language instruction
- develop academic language and register during disciplinary instruction
- provide explicit instruction in literacy (phonemic awareness, phonics, oral reading fluency, and reading vocabulary in context) and language (listening, speaking, reading, and writing)
- use collaborative learning communities to support and extend teacher-led instruction
- provide opportunities for academic discussion of text meaning and interpretation, including interaction with speakers who are proficient in the learner's second language
- align language and content curricula and assessments; and monitor progress using formative assessment practices that support student autonomy.

During the 2020-2021 school year, many EL students are no longer engaged in sustained, in-person schooling and are instead navigating a variety of learning environments, depending on COVID-19 safety guidelines. For educators, adapting these learning environments around evidence-based, high-quality instructional practices is critical. Districts and schools may face transitions between learning environments, requiring collaboration, innovation, and flexibility to ensure the provision of high-quality EL instruction. This paper offers recommendations for state leaders to support high-quality EL instruction in onsite, hybrid, and remote learning environments.

Strategies for Supporting High-Quality Instruction During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Each of the strategies listed below contributes to the development of a statewide system that supports high-quality EL instruction. After summarizing the strategies, the authors provide additional explanation and examples, as well as professional learning scenarios and resources.

Strategy 1. Set clear and ambitious expectations for EL instruction across all learning environments.

It is key for educators to understand what is required to engage ELs in grade-level curriculum. Expectations for EL instruction across learning environments should be guided by ELP and content standards and also should promote engagement in the four language domains: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. It is important that educators design lessons that integrate evidence-based practices for English learners, such as leveraging ELs' cultural and

linguistic assets, providing opportunities for academic discussions, and engaging in formative assessments.

District leaders may consider the following approaches to support districts and schools in setting clear and ambitious expectations for EL instruction:
- Provide examples of asynchronous and synchronous strategies that support high-quality EL instruction. For example, district leaders can offer suggestions and provide teacher training for facilitating academic discussions with EL students in remote learning:
  - *Synchronous:* Describe purposeful uses of breakout rooms during online learning, such as scaffolding discussions with talk moves and/or assigning participant roles.
  - *Asynchronous:* Describe purposeful uses of online tools (such as Google Docs) and video-/slide-creation platforms (such as Flipgrid, PowerPoint, etc.).

General Resources:
- Mississippi Department of Education EL training videos on strategies and tools for supporting English learners. See the full list of training videos on the MDE English Learner Supports webpage.
- The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition has a series of practice briefs and podcasts that highlight promising practices related to science, mathematics, and early-childhood instruction for ELs.

COVID-19 Specific Resources:
- The Mississippi Department of Education's Guidance on Extended Distance Learning for English Learners that can be used to help build customized learning opportunities that meet varying district, school, teacher, student, and family needs.
- WestEd has published a brief titled, *Supporting English Learners During School Closures Considerations for Designing Distance Learning Experiences*. It explains four evidence-based EL instructional practices and provides illustrative examples of these practices in different learning environments.
- Fostering Quality Schools has published an article, *Responding to Education for Multilingual Learners After COVID-19 & Beyond: The Opportunity for Integrated Instruction with Targeted Support,* presenting the benefits and limitations of different remote learning approaches for EL students.

Strategy 2. Create structures for cross-departmental collaboration at the district and school levels that integrate ELs' needs into instructional planning.

When EL-focused leaders collaborate with colleagues from content-specific departments as well as leaders from instructional technology and student support services, it fosters joint problem-solving and innovation focused on developing systems that support high-quality EL instruction. To overcome the isolation of leaders who traditionally work on their own, it is important to organize and facilitate sustainable routines for planning and reflection focused on EL instruction. In school systems that are observing growth in EL achievement, EL students'

needs are central to instructional planning efforts, and their leaders are using virtual meeting platforms to continue fostering shared responsibility for EL instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Examples:

District and school leaders may consider the following approaches to create structures for cross-departmental collaboration:

- Establish cross-departmental instructional planning committees that include specialists in EL education, content, assessment, technology, and student services, and designate time in daily or weekly schedules for these committees to collaborate. Monitor planning committees to be sure that EL specialists are included in strategic planning, content-area curriculum development, COVID-19 guidance development, and research and evaluation activities.
- Collect and disseminate descriptions of cross-departmental structures that districts have in place to support collaboration between leaders and teachers across departments. For example, in some districts, centralized EL specialists are working alongside content-specific instructional coaches and general education teachers to design and implement remote learning lessons for ELs.
- Develop protocols that offer structured processes to support productive cross-departmental conversations that foster shared responsibility for high-quality EL instruction.
- Design professional learning sessions for district and school leaders that include strategies for facilitating cross-departmental collaboration focused on attending to ELs' needs across learning environments.

Resources:

- Honigsfeld and Dove's (2019) book, *Collaborating for English Learners: A Foundation Guide to Integrated Practices*, includes examples of how to include diverse stakeholders in decision-making processes; it also outlines leaders' roles in fostering collaborative practices that support high-quality EL instruction.

Strategy 3. Support schools in monitoring implementation of evidence-based EL instructional practices.

In identifying challenges and designing additional supports, it is critical to
(a) develop tools for monitoring instruction across learning environments and
(b) establish routines and structures for assessing English language proficiency and academic growth.

It also will be important to examine the long-term impact of COVID-related interruptions in schooling to identify and address gaps in EL students' learning.

Examples

State leaders may consider the following approaches to support districts and schools in monitoring implementation:

- Create or modify tools (e.g., surveys, focus groups, interviews, observation protocols) to assess implementation of evidence-based practices for EL students across learning environments, and share them with district and school leaders. For example, observation protocols or walk-through rubrics could be revised as tools to capture evidence of effective practice in a remote learning context.
- Partner with relevant stakeholders (such as professional organizations, Mississippi Department of Education personnel, regional or county offices, and education cooperatives) to develop opportunities for district and school leaders to build capacity in monitoring implementation of high-quality EL instruction.
- Support LEAs in developing dashboards (or using existing analysis tools) that allow for the disaggregation of attendance, English language proficiency, and academic assessment data by grade level, proficiency level, race/ethnicity, newcomers, long-term ELs, former ELs, years in US schools, schooling in the primary language, learning interruptions, disabilities, socioeconomic status, etc. Compare results across schools, noting which have used in-person, hybrid, and remote learning, and for how long.
- Provide opportunities for schools to share strategies for and updates on monitoring efforts.

Scenario

Before the pandemic, the district had been engaged in quarterly classroom walk-throughs to observe the implementation of new instructional materials that support principles of high-quality EL instruction. The walk-throughs provided them with insights related to the types of professional development and curricular modifications that might be needed to facilitate additional shifts in teachers' practices. District leaders are hoping to design new processes to engage in walk-throughs in hybrid and remote learning environments.

Questions:
1. Which partners might district leaders engage to help them modify classroom walk-throughs for remote and hybrid learning contexts?
2. What data would district leaders need to gather and/or analyze to help them understand how EL students are faring in remote and hybrid learning environments, as well as what kind of supports teachers need to be effective in these contexts?

Resources:
- The Mississippi Department of Education offers support in conducting EL Learning Walks and is available for training on how to conduct and evaluate an EL Learning Walk and how to adapt it to a virtual setting. For more information, contact Sandy Elliott selliott@mdek12.org.
- The New Teacher Project has posted a set of survey questions designed to help district leaders understand educators' needs during COVID-19, which can be modified to focus on EL instructional challenges and supports.
- Understanding Language at Stanford University offers two webinars on formative assessment practices with ELs in remote learning. The second session in particular describes several formative assessment tools for use during remote learning, such as

the [ELA Argumentation Analysis Tool](#), [Math Reasoning and Argumentation Analysis Tool](#), and [Garden Grove USD Math Discourse Tool](#).

Strategy 4. Engage families and communities as partners in the development of resources to support EL instruction.

Families and community leaders have a deep understanding of the challenges, concerns, and assets within the EL community and can inform the development of instructional resources for use across diverse learning environments. Navigating transitions among remote, hybrid, and onsite learning environments will require developing new resources for families as they share the responsibility for supporting ELs.

Examples
District and school leaders may consider the following approaches to engaging families and communities as partners:
- Engage families and community leaders in the development of resources (e.g., remote learning plans, attendance policies, etc.) in their preferred languages.
- Encourage schools to regularly survey EL families to learn which linguistic, academic, and socioemotional supports they need in each learning environment.
- Encourage schools to establish partnerships with community- and faith-based organizations to support high-quality EL instruction by communicating expectations for attendance and engagement, establishing support centers, networking families, and strengthening parent leadership.
- Consider allocating fiscal resources to support family liaisons who can sustain two-way communication with families.

Scenario
EL families have expressed their concerns to the district about the lack of clear guidance in languages they can understand regarding their children's education during distance learning. Some families have been attending their children's synchronous class sessions in the hope of understanding what is expected. Teachers have raised the class time spent supporting EL families during instructional time for all students.

Questions:
1. What could the district do to better understand EL families' needs during hybrid and remote learning?
2. How could the district develop remote learning guidance in partnership with EL families?
3. How could the district use community resources to strengthen communication with EL families?

Resources:

- The Mississippi Department of Education has created a guidance document for parents of English Learners. The English Learner Parent Guide is available in [English](#), [Arabic](#), [Chinese](#), [Spanish](#), and [Vietnamese](#).
- The Office of English Language Acquisition has posted a podcast, *[Engaging English Learners and Families through Distance Learning](#),* that shares district strategies for engaging EL families.
- The Region 13 Comprehensive Center at WestEd, in collaboration with the New Mexico Public Education Department, has developed a [webinar](#) focused on building relationships with EL students and families in remote and hybrid learning environments.
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Strategy 5. Develop professional learning opportunities focused on increasing educators' capacities to promote high-quality EL instruction.

The implementation of evidence-based instructional practices for EL students across all learning environments requires new skills and expertise, necessitating the development of professional learning resources for teachers. In addition to learning how to design lessons around evidence-based practices for EL students, educators may benefit from learning how to use digital tools that facilitate high-quality EL instruction across learning environments.

Examples

District leaders may consider the following approaches to developing professional learning opportunities focused on increasing educators' capacities:
- Facilitate collaboration among district and school leaders across multiple departments (e.g., EL, content, special education), regional service centers, and partners from institutions of higher education to develop or revise professional learning opportunities that focus on implementing evidence-based practices for EL instruction across learning environments.
- Allocate funding to incentivize teachers to participate in virtual professional learning opportunities focused on supporting high-quality EL instruction in remote and hybrid learning environments.
- Encourage schools to design professional learning resources focused on high-quality EL instruction, such as model units and lesson plans that articulate goals for language and content development and outline strategies for engaging EL students in academic discussions.

Resources:

- The Mississippi Department of Education provides districts and schools with EL training upon request. For more information on professional development for your district or school, please contact Sandy Elliott at selliott@mdek12.org.
- The U.S. Department of Education has released a report, *[Supporting English Learners through Technology: What Districts and Teachers Say about Digital Learning Resources for English Learners](#)*, on:

- how districts and teachers have identified digital learning resources (DLRs);
  - how teachers have used DLRs;
  - supports for and barriers to DLR use; and
  - suggestions for improving the usefulness of DLRs in EL instruction.

  In addition, the resource *Educator and Developer Toolkits on Using Digital Learning Resources to Support English Learners* supports educators in using technology to facilitate language and academic development and offers guidance on designing educational technology with EL students in mind.
- Sponsored by the Region 13 Comprehensive Center at WestEd, in collaboration with the New Mexico Public Education Department, this webinar series for educators includes strategies for lesson planning and integrating language development into content instruction.
- Sponsored by the Region 15 Comprehensive Center at WestEd in collaboration with the California Teachers Association and California Department of Education, this archived webinar series describes how educators can support multilingual and EL students in remote learning.
- The English Learners Success Forum has a wealth of resources related to high-quality instructional materials for ELs and has outlined specific recommendations for ELs in remote learning.