

A How-to Guide for School Instructional Leaders and Administrators

Using the ELSF Guidelines to Improve Instructional Materials for English Learners

What are the Guidelines?

To make this a reality, ELSF has partnered with over 60 English learner experts from across the U.S. that represent a variety of perspectives across K-12 organizations. This partnership has worked to develop research-based guidelines in English language arts (ELA) and math to support educators in developing and adapting instructional materials to be more inclusive of K-12 students learning English. The Guidelines provide key focus areas for educators as they work to create a more linguistically responsive curriculum across units and lessons.

Why should instructional leaders and administrators care about and use them?

Instructional materials must consider the needs of all students, including the fast-growing demographic of English learners who now represent 1 out of every 10 students in K-12 schools. Is your school and district prepared with instructional materials and practices to meet the needs of this growing population and [ESSA accountability measures](#)? Are your instructional materials and teaching practices working for your English learners? The Guidelines in ELA and math provide a ready tool for professional development at both the school and district levels. These guidelines enable educators to examine and determine what is already included in current curriculum and provide a road map for addressing the gaps for English learners.

Taking the Pulse: Assessing School Culture, Readiness, and Needs

School Leadership Litmus Test

The first critical move as an instructional leader is to uncover and identify your beliefs and understandings around English learners. [This set of reflection questions](#) will help you evaluate how well you're doing for the ELs in your context, but here are some initial thoughts to consider:

- Mindset: Do I believe in amplifying curriculum for the English learners in my school, or do I rely on simplification?
- Consider your principals, assistant principals, coaches, staff developers, and other members of your Instructional Leadership Team. What is the Team's philosophy on how best to support English learners?
- What do I know about how English learners acquire academic language?
 - Does my school have a unified language development framework that integrates content understandings, analytical practices, and language learning?
 - Does my school intentionally and regularly assess student language and content learning and use that assessment to inform school-wide practices?
- What do I need or want to learn more about?
- What are my biases?

Needs of my Particular School and Student Population

Next, consider your context and the needs of your school, teachers, and student population.

- Who are my students and what aspects of their language development should I consider? Think about levels of proficiency, languages spoken, Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE), newcomers, long-term English learners, length of time in the United States, and student history with schooling.
- What does my data tell me about my students **and** my teachers? Consider summative and formative assessments, state exams, qualitative data, teacher observation reports, and informal teacher feedback.

Building on Your Good Work & Setting Goals: Connecting to What You Are Already Doing

Your self-assessment and school evaluation may tell you that your school (curriculum, staff mindset, etc.) requires a minor tune-up, or it may point you in the direction of a colossal overhaul. Regardless of the current situation, it's important to identify successes and set realistic, targeted, and measurable goals. This is where the ELSF Guidelines in English language arts and math can provide assistance. **The Guidelines can help you identify long-term goals (3-5 years) and to use these as a north star for developing and implementing some attainable and measurable short-term goals that are aligned to your school's vision.** Read on for next steps!

We have long term goals, now what?

How to use the guidelines to support professional learning aligned with goals:

Consider how you might engage inquiry teams or PLCs in using the ELSF Guidelines. There are myriad ways! Here are a few principles to get you started:

- Go with the goers: Identify your key players. Who has expertise in English language development and could provide leadership? Who are your risk-takers? Who is willing to learn about the Guidelines and use them to evaluate and improve their instructional materials? Who has the capacity and initiative to lead the work?
- Examine Instructional Materials for “Intentional and Integrated Support” for English learners—beyond “call out boxes” added onto lessons/units: What are the strengths within the focus areas? What are critical needs or gaps? How can we improve various aspects of a unit of a curriculum? Which content area requires the most attention for improvement?
- Conduct a Mini-Review Process using the Guidelines Inventory survey in [ELA](#) or [Math](#). For this process, form a small focus group comprised of a vertical team of teaching staff including EL teachers, content teachers, special education teachers, and literacy/math coaches.

There are various avenues you may take, and all depend on the pulse of your school and district and where your continuous improvement efforts will yield accelerated learning and academic success for English learners. Consider starting small with a pilot group. Who has influence over others? Who are your stakeholders? Involve your teachers, collaborate with them, let them be the movers and the shakers. Set realistic goals that are manageable for you and your teachers. If possible, broaden your learning community and propose a school-wide or district-wide instructional leadership study group where instructional leaders can work together using the Guidelines to find key areas to support the district's vision.

Your instructional materials may require minor adjustments or intensive revision. Change takes time. The important thing is that the school community cultivates a mindset of continuous improvement. Whichever direction you take, start small, stay focused and invite collaboration.

Flashes of Insight: How to Think About Using the Guidelines

- Start small: Pick one focus area from the Guidelines to target.
- Consider your professional development: are you satisfying requirements for PD around English learners?
- Think across the school year: shifts in curriculum take time! Think about when and how you might use the Guidelines.
- Pop short, manageable professional articles into teachers' mailboxes that support your vision and the Guidelines.
- Get creative when budgets are tight: Invite teachers to “lunch-and-learns” where teachers take the lead and provide mini PD sessions around the Guidelines and the research base that supports them.
- Regularly monitor student outcomes related to the focus areas and goals you have identified
- To build buy-in and trust, co-teach and co-plan with your teachers as you implement revised curriculum inclusive for English learners
- Celebrate small wins, especially with your most resistant teachers.