

Taking the Pulse

Are my instructional materials and teaching practices working for my EL students?

Students who are English learners (ELs) currently number 4.6 million, representing about 10% of the student population. At the same time college- and career-ready standards require ELs to perform at the same level as their English-dominant peers. Facilitating academic success for ELs can feel overwhelming without effective instructional materials and teacher guidance on ways to support these students to thrive emotionally, socially, and academically. The English Learners Success Forum (ELSF) wants to support educators in evaluating their instructional materials and teaching practices, designing their lessons and utilizing a variety of instructional strategies to help ELs be successful.

Honestly reflect on the following questions:

1. **Do you know your students, and are you considering their past experiences? Are you building on students' already-existing social, academic, and emotional competencies? Are you endeavoring to build positive relations with EL students and their families?**
2. **Do I know about my ELs' formal schooling experiences, home language, degree of native- and English-language development, length of time in the U.S. and in U.S. schools, and family backgrounds? Am I able to use those demographic profiles to inform my instructional practices and recognize and build upon students' strengths to develop ELA and/or math knowledge?**
3. **Are ELs' families consistently aware of what their students are learning in the classroom and understand how best to support their children? To what extent are my ELs' parents informed about our curriculum, teaching methods, and their children's strengths and challenges in the classroom? What are the channels of communication I have created to enable parents to contact me?**
4. **Do my ELs feel supported in strategically using their home language in my classroom to engage in the learning process?**



5. Do I provide opportunities to draw on and incorporate students' cultural background, interests, and lived experiences in their learning?
6. Do I establish objectives that integrate language and content learning for all students throughout the unit?
7. Are my ELs currently engaged in grade-level learning activities alongside their peers? Are my ELs able to build content knowledge at the same level as their English-dominant peers and are they meeting the college- and career-ready standards?
8. Are my assessment practices appropriate and sufficient to collect my students' progress data?
9. Do I provide scaffolds as a result of my formative assessment of student needs and then gradually remove them as students become increasingly autonomous?
10. Am I able to tell the difference between when students are struggling with disciplinary concepts and when they are struggling with the language needed to understand or express those concepts? Am I able to identify language demands and develop language supports for ELs to support them in meeting those demands?
11. Do I know my students' language proficiency levels? Is my instruction deliberate and intentional to ensure ELs at all proficiency levels can access and productively struggle with discipline-specific language in learning grade-level content and skills in increasingly more sophisticated ways?
12. Do my instructional practices support ELs in engaging in conversations with their peers during group/partner work, or are they often quiet?
13. Are my instructional and class routines providing equal opportunities for ELs to respond to questions in multiple ways from me or their classmates?
14. Are my students able to reflect on their language and content learning? Do I provide multiple ways for students to convert their understanding and grapple with grade-level content? Do my ELs participate at high levels and produce work that reflects effort and engagement with their learning?
15. Are my lessons calling on students to carry out the kind of language moves and practices that provide for rich language development, and building analytical and conceptual understanding of lesson content?



Answer according to your content area:

English Language Arts	Mathematics
<p>16. Are my ELs primarily interacting with simplified texts or am I using strategies to help them access the same appropriately complex, grade-level texts as their peers?</p> <p>17. Are my ELs able to engage in the writing process and produce strong academic writing?</p> <p>18. Are my ELs showing signs of progression in writing skills over time?</p>	<p>16. Are my ELs solving math problems that maintain rigorous language reflective of grade-level concepts?</p> <p>17. Do my ELs see themselves as mathematicians? How is their mathematical confidence?</p> <p>18. Do students in my class seek help from or ask for the opinion of ELs when solving math problems?</p> <p>19. How often are my ELs writing in math class? More than one sentence? More than a paragraph?</p>

If you answered “Yes” to most of the questions above, congratulations! You are creating the conditions for academic success, raising expectations and bettering the learning outcomes for the ELs in your classrooms. You can follow [this link](#) to our guidelines and resources that will further support your ELs.

If you answered “No” to many of the questions above, you should follow [this link](#) to a set of guidelines and resources that will support your instructional practices to better meet the needs of your students.

Getting to know your students is the first step in building a relationship with them and their families, and in discovering and leveraging their assets for disciplinary learning.