A How-to Guide for State Leaders:  
Using the ELSF Guidelines to Improve Instructional Materials for English Learners

ESSA presents new opportunities

One result of No Child Left Behind (2002) is that states developed standards and measures for English language proficiency. Assessment and reporting requirements helped to foster awareness of the opportunity gap faced by English learners across the country. Despite the focus on English learners, most leaders would agree that progress has been slow. With the implementation of ESSA, states have the opportunity to renew the focus on the barriers that impede English learners.

It’s Time to Focus on Instructional Materials

The English Learner Success Forum (ELSF) believes that access to quality instructional materials must be a priority, and that well-designed materials will benefit both educators and students. ELSF believes it is both more efficient and impactful to design instructional materials for English learners up front. Core ELA and mathematics instructional materials should present students with rich and authentic opportunities to develop language while learning challenging, grade-level content.

What are the Guidelines?

ELSF collaborates with field-leading researchers, district leaders, teachers, content creators, and education funders to improve the supply and accessibility of high-quality K-12 ELA and mathematics instructional materials that are inclusive of English learner students. As a result of this collaboration, ELSF has developed Guidelines for Improving English Language Arts Materials for English Learners as well as Guidelines for Improving Mathematics Materials for English Learners. These Guidelines can help gauge the quality of supports in existing materials as well as to identify specific ways to address gaps. The Guidelines incorporate the most recent research on language development and instruction and provide clear guidance and concrete examples for educators.

The English Learners Success Forum believes quality teaching paired with effective instructional guidance is critical to the academic success of English learners.

1 Choosing Blindly: Instructional Materials, Teacher Effectiveness, and the Common Core
State Education Leaders: Elevate the Importance of English Learners

State education agencies have the opportunity to better integrate the needs of English learners and their families across the entire state agency. ELSF urges leaders to create a compelling vision that goes beyond accountability metrics and compliance.

Assess and Build Capacity for Internal Leadership—Across the Organization

- Ensure that all key leaders across the organization understand the demographics and current achievement levels of the state’s English learners.
- Expect that all key leaders create plans and systems that address the needs of English learners and their families in a meaningful way, and coordinate across departments and divisions to maximize impact.
- Coach and support all key leaders to ensure that they approach English learners and their families with an asset-based perspective, and seek ways to meaningfully engage and to build their own linguistic and cultural competency.

“*The essential holding of Lau [is] that schools are not free to ignore the need of limited English speaking children for language assistance to enable them to participate in the instructional program of the district.*” (Castañeda v. Pickard, 1981)

Prioritize Instructional Materials as a Lever for Change

- Push for a Shift in Mindset: Instead of **simplifying**, push for **amplifying** the curriculum to ensure rigor and engagement for all students.
- Ensure that academic leaders within the state agency as well as people involved in guiding material selection understand the rationale for utilizing the Guidelines.
- Advocate for a stronger focus on instructional materials as part of comprehensive school and district improvement efforts, as well as Title VI projects. A great starting point is the Guidelines Inventory survey in **ELA** or **Math**.
- Include ELSF Guidelines on Procurement Resource lists.

Connect Educators with ELSF

The English Learners Success Forum (ELSF) wants to support educators. Visit our website ([https://www.elsuccessforum.org/](https://www.elsuccessforum.org/)) to access our Guidelines and our growing list of resources, follow us on Twitter (@elsuccessforum), or contact me directly at: cgonzales@elsuccessforum.org.