Making the Common Core Standards Work for English Language Learners: The Importance of Linking English Language Proficiency Standards to the Common Core Standards

AFT Education Policy Forum
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The Common Core Standards are based on what students need to know and be able to do by the end of high school in order to be college and career-ready.
Currently, 36 states and the District of Columbia have signed up to adopt the Common Core standards.
As the Common Core Standards are implemented, the needs of English Language Learners must be taken into consideration.
The face of public schools has changed dramatically over the past three decades, and English language learners now constitute more than 10 percent of the preK-12 population, or close to 6 million students.

We need to make sure that ELLs have access to the grade-level content knowledge included in the Common Core Standards.
What do we mean when we say English language proficiency and “ELP standards” - what is an example of an ELP standard?
What Do We Mean by English Language Proficiency for PreK – 12 Grade Students?

- **GILD’s Broad Definition:** Language proficiency (or linguistic proficiency) is the demonstrated ability of a student to speak, understand, comprehend, read and write in the acquired language (i.e. English).

- **GILD’s Operational Definition:** Language proficiency of an English language learner means the English language the student has developed and acquired. That is, sufficient knowledge, skills and ability in speaking, reading, writing, and understanding the English language so as to ensure that such a student has the opportunity to learn successfully in classrooms where the language of instruction is English and affords the student access to rigorous grade level academic content instruction.
What Are English Language Proficiency Standards?

English Language Proficiency Standards Provide:

- The language domain and broad statement of what an English Language Learner is expected to understand.
- The minimum academic path necessary to achieve proficiency for each language domain.
- The skill level at which an English Language Learner can access the core curriculum for each language domain.
- A focused description of what an English Language Learner is expected to know and be able to do in English at the end of instruction.
- A description of the English language skill level at which an English Language Learner can access instruction.
- An observable student action used to judge learning.
Standard II: Speaking – Formulate ideas and communicate ideas effectively to others.

Objective (Benchmark) 1: Use academic language to express ideas coherently and clearly to peers, teachers, and others.

Expectation 1: Use academic vocabulary to describe concepts (e.g., observe, describe, compare, sort, classify) in content areas.
How has your research on language development and acquisition contributed to our understanding of the supports that ELLs would need to meet new common core standards?
Reading and Writing: Particularly Important Skills for ELLs

• They demonstrate Independence
  – Request clarification and ask relevant questions.
  – Become self-directed learners, effectively seeking out and using resources to assist them.
    • Resources include teachers, peers, print and digital reference materials.
    • Other resources (not listed in the standards, but important) include first language knowledge and skills; strategies to use context to make sense of text.
Reading and Writing: Particularly Important Skills for ELLs

• They respond to the varying demands of text
  – They set and adjust purpose for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language use as warranted by the task.

• They come to understand other perspectives and cultures
  – Communicate effectively with people of varied backgrounds.
  – Read literature representative of a variety of cultures and worldviews.
**Speaking and Listening: Particularly Important Skills for ELLs**

- Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on other’s ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively
  - L2 acquisition occurs through meaningful interactions with native L2 speakers.
  - However, there is considerable ongoing residential and school segregation by race, ethnicity, and income.

- Ask and answer questions in order to seek help, get information, or clarify if something is not understood.
Language: Particularly Important Skills for ELLs

• Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning and style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

• Knowledge of language should include
  – Pragmatic knowledge--knowledge of language use in context (status/purpose of speaker, genre structures)
  – Linguistic knowledge--knowledge of the functional demands of writing and speaking (e.g., formulate questions, compare/contrast, summarize, draw conclusions)
Language: Particularly Important Skills for ELLs

• Recognize variations from standard English in their own and others’ writing and speaking and identify and use strategies to improve expression in conventional language
  – Important to create self directed learners
  – Children will acquire language according to their own timetable and having so this is particularly important. In essence they are creating their own individual syllabus.
What has helped you meet your students' needs for language and content acquisition; why is the simultaneous pursuit of these two absolutely necessary for students' success?
Why Teach Language with Content?

• How the brain acquires language

• Content is more accessible and comprehensible

• Better use of time in a standards-based approach
How to Teach Language with Content?

- Building background
- Comprehensible input
- Strategies for success
- Practice and application
- Frequent, formative assessment
Video Clip from Colorín Colorado “Watch and Learn” Series

http://www.colorincolorado.org/multimedia/learn
What kind of efforts are or should be underway in the states to address the implementation of the common core standards successfully when it comes to ELLs?
Efforts Currently Underway

- **CCSSO**
  - Working with a group of key stakeholders on issues pertinent to academic language expectations in relation to the common core standards

- **WIDA**
  - 24 states in their consortium
  - Augmenting their language proficiency standards so they map onto the common core standards

- **California Collaborative**
  - Developing formative assessments that map onto the standards
**Efforts to Aid Implementation**

- Additional time, appropriate instructional support, and aligned assessments.
- Teachers and personnel at the school and district levels well prepared and qualified to support ELLs and take advantage of the strengths and skills they bring to the classroom.
- Coursework that prepares ELLs for postsecondary education or the workplace yet that is made comprehensible for students learning content in a second language through specific pedagogical techniques and additional resources.
Efforts to Aid Implementation

• Instruction that develops foundational skills in English that enable ELLs to participate fully in grade-level coursework (back-mapping).
• Well-designed opportunities for classroom discourse and interaction to enable ELLs to develop communicative strengths in language arts.
• Speakers of English who know the language well enough to provide the ELLs with models and support.
• Ongoing assessment and feedback to guide learning.
What does alignment of ELP standards to core standards mean; why is this alignment important, and why is it so important to tie ELP to content acquisition?
Why Align ELP Standards to Core Standards?

Reason #1: It’s required by federal law. States must “. . . . establish standards and objectives for raising the level of English proficiency that are derived from the four recognized domains of speaking, listening, reading and writing, and that are aligned with achievement of the challenging State academic content and student academic achievement standards described in section 1111(b)(1).” [Title III, NCLB, Section 3113]

Reason #2: It’s a matter of civil rights. “Where inability to speak and understand the English language excludes natural origin minority group children from effective participation in the educational program offered by a school district, the district must take affirmative steps to rectify the language deficiency in order to open its instructional program to these students.” [Supreme Court Decision; Lau v. Nichols; January 1974]
What Does Alignment of ELP Standards to Content Standards Mean?

- **Alignment** refers to the degree to which there is a “direct” match between the description of language domain and skill level, and the description of content objective.

- Aligning ELP standards to academic content standards provides a focused description of what an English Language Learner is expected to know, be able to do and demonstrate in English at the end of instruction for any given content objective.

- Even more importantly - alignment of ELP standards to content standards provide a description of the English language knowledge and skill level at which an English Language Learner can access instruction and thus have the opportunity to learn and master the content objectives, and attain expected academic achievement standards.
What Would Alignment of ELP Standards to New Common Core Content Standards Look Like?

NCCS: Language Arts – Reading Standards for Literature K – 5 Key Ideas and Details (Grade 4):

1. Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
2. Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.
3. Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character’s thoughts, words, or actions).

Example of Aligned ELP Standards and Benchmarks (Grade 4):

1. Make predictions, inferences, and deductions, and discuss the meaning of literary works with attention to meaning beyond the literal level, to understand and interpret text presented orally and in written form.
2. Identify and use reading and listening strategies to make literary text comprehensible and meaningful. Strategies such as skimming, scanning, previewing, reviewing, listening selectively or for a specific purpose, and listening for main ideas and details.

Analyze, compare and contrast characters, setting, theme, point of view and plot of text.

The Global Institute for Language & Literacy Development, LLC.
How are ELP standards pertinent to the work of mainstream teachers and what do schools and educators need to do so that all teachers can implement this successfully?
How are ELP Standards Pertinent?

- Maintain high expectations
- Understand students
- Collaborate with others
- Know what students know and can do
How to Support Implementation?

• Familiarity with Common Core State Standards
• Aligned English Language Proficiency Standards
• Well-developed, content-rich curriculum
• Instructional resources
• Formative and summative assessments
• Supportive teaching and learning environment
• Access to high-quality professional development
Please share with us your closing thoughts, as well as what you think stakeholders need to think about to have sound policy and practice in aligning ELP standards to the common core standards.
Helping ELLs Meet the Common Core Standards: Next Steps

• ELLs are a heterogeneous group and effectively educating these students requires diagnosing each student instructionally, adjusting instruction to meet their needs and strengths, and monitoring their progress.
Helping ELLs Meet the Common Core Standards: Next Steps

• At each level of proficiency (e.g., beginning, intermediate, and advanced) it will be important to:
  – Define ELL’s challenges and strengths.
  – Describe methods and materials that will help ELLs meet the standard.
  – Develop methods to reliably and validly assess ELLs knowledge and skills.
Example

- Determine the meaning of unknown and multiple meaning words and phrases based on grade 3 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies
  - Expose ELLs to grade 3 reading and content
  - Support, differentiated by level of proficiency
- Scaffolding to help ELLs understand the meaning of passage
- Strategy instruction in
  - Using context
  - Using resources (e.g. teachers, peers, resources)
  - Using first language knowledge
Example

- Demonstrate command of conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking
  - ELLs will be able to do this in natural speech and writing only at their developmental level of English proficiency
- Support
  - Explicit instruction in grammatical forms in the context of meaningful communication
  - Opportunities for ongoing communication with L2 speakers
  - Instruction in self-monitoring
Thanks So Much for Giving Me the Opportunity to Talk with You
An Aligned System of Standards & Assessment: The Only Way to Ensure ELL Academic Achievement

English Language Proficiency Standards

Academic Content Standards

Aligned

Curriculum

Aligned

INSTRUCTION
(Language Development/Acquisition & Content)

Evidenced-based Research

Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives

State Academic Content Objectives

Data

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We need to deliver grade-level content as much as possible, raise expectations as students progress, and give all children, no matter what their zip code, a great education.