CCNETWORK Regional Comprehensive Center Northwest

Improving English language arts outcomes among multilingual students

Multilingual students identified as English learners bring valuable personal, linguistic, and cultural assets that can support academic success. The achievements of former English learners demonstrate these strengths.[1] However, educators may find it difficult to identify evidence-based instructional practices and programs that build on these assets. The Northwest Comprehensive Center created this resource to help Oregon district leaders and educators identify practices and programs that improve English language arts (ELA) outcomes among multilingual (ML) students. This resource identifies six strategies:

1. Teach academic vocabulary intensively using a variety of instructional activities
2. Integrate oral and written English language instruction into content-area teaching
3. Provide ML students with regular, structured opportunities to develop written language
4. Provide small-group interventions to ML students struggling with literacy and reading
5. Provide ML-focused professional learning to educators and support them to earn English for Speakers of Other Languages endorsements
6. Implement K–12 dual language programs and make sure ML students classified as English learners can access them

For each strategy we address the estimated implementation time, the most appropriate settings and student populations, how to get started, and where you can learn more. Not every strategy will be practical or appropriate for every district or school.

These strategies are supported by rigorous research that is aligned with Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) tiers of evidence. We identify strategies with **STRONG EVIDENCE,** including findings from at least one randomized controlled trial and multiple correlational studies. We also identify strategies with **ML EVIDENCE,** showing positive effects for students classified as English learners. A database of the research is available.

The Oregon Department of Education's Multilingual Learner Strategic Plan identifies four priority areas to support English learner students and families:



Authentic and responsive community engagement and partnerships



Transformative educators and administrators



Systems, instruction, and assessment improvements



Pathways to multilingualism

Throughout this brief, we use icons to identify the intersection between each strategy and the four priorities.

These strategies are not necessarily the most effective ways to improve student outcomes overall. These strategies focus on what districts and schools can do to improve ELA outcomes for ML students.

Instructional strategies to improve ELA Outcomes

Estimated implementation time: 1–2 years



Strategy 1. Teach academic vocabulary intensively using a variety of instructional activities STRONG EVIDENCE | ML EVIDENCE

Strategy 2. Integrate oral and written English language instruction into content-area teaching STRONG EVIDENCE | ML EVIDENCE

Strategy 3. Provide ML students with regular, structured opportunities to develop written language ML EVIDENCE

Most appropriate settings and student populations. Teachers in any content area can use these strategies.[2] These practices are effective among diverse ML students[3] in grades K–8 ELA, social studies, science, and mathematics classroom,[4] and there is reason to believe that they are effective K–12.[5]

How to get started

Districts can offer professional development, coaching, and peer learning so all teachers—not only ML teachers—learn to integrate these strategies in their daily practice. For example, districts can consider adding these to district professional development calendars, as well as creating professional learning communities around these practices.

Learn more

What Works Clearinghouse Practice Guide: Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School

Reading interventions to improve ELA Outcomes

Estimated implementation time: 2–3 years



Strategy 4. Provide small-group instructional interventions to students struggling with literacy and reading STRONG EVIDENCE | ML EVIDENCE

Most appropriate settings and student populations. Students who are learning English and struggling with reading should receive targeted support. Research shows that the same proven reading interventions used with other struggling readers are effective for ML students,[6] especially when taught in small groups. Explicit instruction in phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary is effective for all students, including ML students.[7] These interventions can be delivered in multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) frameworks in classroom or in pull-out settings. Small-group instruction (groups of 2–5 students) is most effective for this strategy.[8]

How to get started

Districts can implement MTSS frameworks to ensure that all students receive the reading supports and interventions they need. All students—regardless of their ML status—should receive tier 1 (classroom) instruction as well as the targeted reading interventions they need to succeed.

Learn more

Evidence-Based Instruction in an MTSS Framework

Reflection and Continuous Improvement for Multi-Tiered Systems of Support in Reading

System changes to improve ELA outcomes

Estimated implementation time: 3-plus years



Strategy 5. Provide ML-focused professional learning to educators and support them to earn English for Speakers of Other Languages endorsements ML EVIDENCE

Most appropriate settings and student populations. Studies show that professional development helps teachers improve their practice and improves student achievement.[9] Well-prepared teachers are one of the most important factors in making sure students get the instruction they need to succeed.[10] MLs make stronger academic progress and learn English more successfully when their teachers receive training on how to support them.[11] Professional development programs that provide in-depth coursework and teaching practicums that culminate in an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) endorsement help teachers improve language proficiency outcomes for ML students in grades K–12 in Oregon[12] and

nationally.[13] Teachers who receive training similar to an ESOL endorsement and share demographic characteristics with their students—especially race/ethnicity—have larger impacts on their ELA outcomes.[14]

How to get started

Districts can provide educators with consistent access to high-quality training focused on supporting MLs. They can also prioritize hiring teachers with ESOL or similar endorsements and partner with educator preparation programs to help teachers earn these credentials at no or low cost through state or federal funding. In addition, districts can develop grow-your-own teacher programs using available state and federal funds.

Learn more

Effective Teacher Professional Development

Grow Your Own Educators: A Toolkit for Program Design and Development



Strategy 6. Implement K–12 dual language programs and make sure ML students classified as English learners can access them STRONG EVIDENCE | ML EVIDENCE

Most appropriate settings and student populations. Dual language and bilingual programs teach students in both English and a partner language. They help students become skilled in two languages, learn to read and write in both languages, succeed in grade-level schoolwork, and develop the social and cultural skills they need to interact successfully with others. Research shows that these programs improve ELA outcomes among K–12 ML students in Oregon and nationally.[15] Dual language programs benefit students who speak the partner language at home (for example, Spanish),[16] students who speak English at home, and students who speak other languages.[17] There is some evidence that the effect of dual language on ELA outcomes may not be readily apparent until late elementary or middle school grades.[18]

How to get started

Districts can explore dual language research and different language allocation models. They can analyze student enrollment data by home language to understand local needs. They can also involve families and community members in planning decisions through a formal advisory board or by providing other ways for them to share ideas and feedback.

Learn more

Guiding Principles for Dual Language Education

Office of English Language Acquisition Dual Language Immersion Playbooks

Endnotes

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