

FOR SCHOOL SITE, DISTRICT & COUNTY LEVEL CONVERSATIONS

RAISE YOUR VOICE ON BEHALF OF ENGLISH LEARNERS IN THE ROLL OUT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS

SECTION I: RAISE YOUR VOICE - THIS IS OUR CHANCE!

The Common Core Standards are a great opportunity to implement some of the important things we know from research that will make a significant difference for English Learners, and promises to provide a framework of rigorous education that will prepare English Learners for the 21st century. Raise your voice about how the Common Core supports a powerful English Learner education, and push for the supports needed to realize the Common Core for our English Learners.

SPEAK OUT!

There are great things about the Common Core Standards for English Learners

#1. BE SURE PEOPLE KNOW: Now, we ALL need to support language development!

The Common Core Standards call upon ALL academic content teachers (not just teachers of ELD) to focus on the language practices, academic vocabulary, language functions, communication and the oral language skills that students need in order to participate and succeed in academic work. We are ALL responsible for the language needs of our students. English Learners will need support for language in every classroom and academic discipline. (*Anchor Standard for Language #1-5, Reading #4, Speaking and Listening # 1,4 and 6*)

ADVOCATE:

For the Common Core to work, we need training! ALL teachers need to receive professional development, coaching and support so that they understand language development and language development strategies sufficiently to implement active language engagement and academic language development in the classroom – for English Learners and all students.

For the Common Core to work, we need appropriate materials! Districts and sites will need to select and purchase curriculum and supplementary materials that support academic and oral language development for all curricular areas.

#2. BE SURE PEOPLE KNOW: This calls for a change in teaching pedagogy!

The Common Core Standards call for students to develop skills of discussion, teamwork and collaboration in academic work and to be actively engaged in inquiry-based and collaborative work. The standards raise the demand for high levels of classroom discourse and inquiry across all subjects including active interaction with peers, teachers and small groups. (*Anchor Standard #1: Speaking and Listening*)

ADVOCATE:

For the Common Core to work, teachers need to receive professional development, coaching and support in strategies for cooperative learning, multiple formats for structuring interactive academic work, and how to support English Learners at varying proficiency levels to be active participants in collaborative activity.

For the Common Core to work, we will need to stop using curriculum and teaching pedagogy that is almost all teacher-directed, teacher-talk. We need to make room for the TIME needed and the investment in developing and using collaborative, interactive, inquiry-based pedagogy!

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SECTION II: RAISE AN OBJECTION

Any reform that increases rigor and attempts to change school practices and does not address how English Learners will be supported to master that rigor can exacerbate the barriers and achievement gaps that have characterized the education of English Learners for too long. This is particularly true for the Common Core Standards, given how significant they are and how quickly they are being rolled out. Keep an ear open for these red-flag warning signs.

RED FLAG #1: THE ENTIRE DISCUSSION OF THE COMMON CORE HAS LITTLE OR NO MENTION OF ENGLISH LEARNERS

“WAIT A MINUTE! OBJECTION!”:

You can't build rigor on a faulty foundation. The Common Core calls for ramped up rigor from current practices, and the language and literacy demands are high. Right now, we aren't even getting many of our English Learners to the low-bar of CELDT proficiency much less the academic language needed for participating and succeeding in our current academic curricula. The focus on oral language development and academic language has been inadequate, the provision of ELD has been generally weak, our teachers don't have adequate skills in scaffolding the curriculum for English Learners, and curriculum materials have been insufficient for moving English Learners to the level of English they need! If we are going to “ramp up” instruction to get English Learners to the bar that the Common Core standards require, we must build the basic foundation for serving our English Learners.

ADVOCATE:

For the Common Core to work for English Learners, we need to plan and devote resources to a basic foundation of English Learner support, including:

- Strengthening implementation of ELD
- Ensuring teachers have the scaffolding strategies across the curriculum to provide English Learners access to the rigorous Common Core, and professional development in differentiating instruction.
- Pacing accommodations for English Learners
- Providing well-implemented, strong research-based English Learner program models, including a bilingual alternative option

Also, teachers need professional development and support on understanding and implementing the new English Language Proficiency standards that are aligned to the Common Core.

RED FLAG #2: ALL OF THE ATTENTION IS ON ANALYZING THE LANGUAGE OF THE TEXT, AND ENGAGING STUDENTS WITH COMPLEX TEXT – AND NO MENTION OF BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE OR ENGAGING STUDENTS IN MAKING CONNECTIONS TO THEIR LIVES AND PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

“WAIT A MINUTE! OBJECTION!”:

In order to comprehend rigorous and complex academic text, English Learners need to understand the references, the cultural knowledge and academic concepts. Many English Learners have been through years of being given much simplified texts, and a narrowed curriculum (getting just English language arts and math but little if any social studies, science or the arts). If they are going to be able to comprehend academic text, English Learners need instruction that from kindergarten on up through the grades builds essential background knowledge across the curriculum, and facilitates making connections between what they are learning, what they are reading, and to their lives, culture and prior knowledge.

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ADVOCATE:

For the Common Core to work for English Learners, we have to insist on a full academic curriculum for all students (including science, social studies and the arts), and ending the practice of filling the day and the student schedule only with English language arts classes, math classes, supports and interventions.

For the Common Core to work for English Learners, we need professional development for teachers in strategies that engage students in making connections to their prior knowledge and experience.

RED FLAG #3: ALL OF THE FOCUS ON THE “ENGLISH THAT ENGLISH LEARNERS NEED” IS ABOUT ACADEMIC ENGLISH

“WAIT A MINUTE! OBJECTION!”:

The Common Core Standards do not address building the basic foundation in English for English Learners that native speakers already know. There is no attention to the study of English as a second language, and they do not attend to the foundation that is needed in the communicative, expressive and social domains. Our English Learners need an effective, comprehensive English Language Development program that is aligned to the Common Core Standards. These go hand-in-hand. We cannot forget how important ELD is and seeing to it that our English Learners get the strong communicative, expressive and social language they need to function in this society and as a foundation for the academic language the Common Core requires.

ADVOCATE:

For the Common Core to work for English Learners, we need all teachers to address English language development in the content areas AND a comprehensive ELD program that includes communicative, expressive and social language and that builds the full pathway towards academic language called for in the Common Core Standards for students who are second language learners.

SECTION III: RAISE YOUR HAND, ASK A QUESTION

1. What kind of guidance, support and resources will be available to help teachers unpack and integrate each standard to understand the language demands and to interpret the linguistic implications of the Common Core for instructing English Learners?
2. What kind of professional development will our teachers get in how to support English learners to engage with the kind of complex text and language called for in the Common Core?
3. How soon will we be receiving information, professional development and support regarding the new English Language Development standards aligned to the Common Core?

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SECTION IV: LEST WE FORGET... ..

There are key elements of a powerful English Learner agenda that we need to pursue even though they aren't explicitly included in the Common Core Standards. We need to be sure that in the focus on Common Core Standards, that other work does not fall by the wayside – to the peril of our English Learners.

TALKING POINT #1: BILITERACY IS A 21ST CENTURY ASSET FOR ALL STUDENTS, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF DUAL LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY IS A POWERFUL PATHWAY FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

Back-up Information: Superintendent Torlakson's "Blueprint for Great Schools" calls for biliteracy for all students, and there is strong research on the brain benefits, educational benefits, labor market benefits and social benefits of mastery of two or more languages. Furthermore, the Common Core Standards DO call for students to understand that language use is different in different contexts, and explore how to make choices about which language registers and forms to use in different contexts. Dual language study is a particularly effective setting in which students can develop that understanding. The California Department of Education's "Improving Education for English Learners: Research-Based Approaches" publication supports the efficacy of bilingual and dual language program options for English Learners.