

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. The Common Core Standards provide a framework of rigorous education that can prepare English Learners (as all students) 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 ALL teachers will 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. 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*)

#2. BE SURE PEOPLE KNOW: The Common Core Standards call 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. (*Anchor Standard #1: Speaking and Listening*) The standards raise the demand for a high level of classroom discourse and inquiry, including active interaction with peers, teachers and small groups – a challenge for English Learners.

#3. BE SURE PEOPLE KNOW: California teachers using existing adopted curriculum and pedagogies have not been using the strategies that will be called for by the Common Core Standards. Existing today is a widespread lack of capacity and perceived lack of permission for implementing the teaching approaches that will develop the Common Core skills.

ADVOCATE:

For the Common Core to work for English Learners, teachers need to receive professional development on “English Learners and the Common Core” – including understanding language development and language development strategies sufficiently to promote active language engagement and academic language development in the classroom, 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 for English Learners, policy frameworks that result in narrowing the curriculum (such as the Essential Program Components for Program Improvement Schools) and the over-use of remediation and interventions that narrow the curriculum, will need to change so that English Learners receive the full academic curriculum within which language is developed. This includes social studies, science and the arts.

For the Common Core to work for English Learners, the new English Language Arts/English Language Development Curriculum Framework will need to make the language demands and language skills explicit in order to support the creation and adoption of core and supplementary materials that support academic and oral language development, inquiry and collaboration skills.

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. THE FOCUS ON THE COMMON CORE HAS PUSHED ASIDE OR MADE DIFFICULT A FOCUS ON ENGLISH LEARNER ISSUES

“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 have to 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 towards ensuring a basic foundation of English Learner support, including:

- Implementing the new adopted, comprehensive ELD standards that are aligned to the Common Core and that address basic foundational English language proficiency needs
- Strengthening implementation of ELD through appropriate materials and professional development
- Monitoring implementation of ELD
- Ensuring teacher professional development initiatives and preservice education address strategies for providing English Learner access to core content by focusing on academic language development, scaffolding and differentiation strategies for varying English proficiency levels
- Providing guidance from the state level and education leadership articulating and calling for well-implemented, strong research-based English Learner program models, including a bilingual alternative option

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 a spiral curriculum where instruction from kindergarten through high school 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.

ADVOCATE:

For the Common Core Standards to work for English Learners, we need state policy that ensures a full academic curriculum for all students (including science, social studies and the arts), and an end to the Essential Program Component requirements for Program Improvement schools that fill the school day and the student schedule with only English language arts and math classes and interventions.

For the Common Core Standards to work for English Learners, we need state-wide professional development initiatives, pre-service preparation, and curriculum frameworks that incorporate strategies for accessing prior knowledge, building connections to life experiences, and making a strong self-to-text connection.

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 Standards to work for English Learners, schools need to implement comprehensive ELD programs that include communicative, expressive and social language as well as build the pathway towards academic language for students who are second language learners.

For the Common Core Standards to work for English Learners, the new state English Language Development Standards should be prominently rolled-out with a strategy that informs administrators and teachers of the content of those new standards and implications for programs, curriculum and instruction. This needs to include: professional development for teachers, leadership development for Principals and district administrators/leaders.

RED FLAG #4: THE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM IS STILL IN MANY WAYS AN UNKNOWN, AND THERE REMAIN MANY UNANSWERED QUESTIONS ABOUT HOW ENGLISH LEARNERS WILL BE ACCOMMODATED OR ASSURED VALID AND RELIABLE ASSESSMENT OR HOW THE STATE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM WILL INCORPORATE THOSE ASSESSMENTS.

KEEP THE ISSUE ON THE TABLE: TALKING POINTS

We're concerned about the assessments.

- Linguistic complexity in the assessment is very likely to present a barrier to English Learners being able to demonstrate what they know. It is essential that the new assessments control for linguistic complexity and that the computer adaptability aspect of the assessment will control for this.
- For valid and reliable results, and to ensure accountability for English Learner achievement of the Common Core, the new assessment/accountability system must continue a focus on English Learners as a subgroup and include measures of performance and progress on in English Language Proficiency. Data on English Learner achievement must be analyzed by the number of years an English Learner has been in our schools so we can monitor for the development of Long Term English Learners. Finally, we need a primary language assessment for both math and Language Arts – at least in Spanish.
- Bilingual programs, an effective and important program option for English Learners, will only remain an option if the state develops primary language assessments. There is danger that the advent of the Common Core could spell another deathblow to bilingual education options if we do not have state-adopted adequate assessments.
- The Common Core Assessment needs to incorporate assessment of skills of the 4 Cs (creativity, collaboration, critical thinking and communication). These are skills that are incorporated into the standards, but less likely to be incorporated into assessment. In professional development as well as assessment, it is essential that there be leadership and active voices keeping these crucial 21st century skills on the table.

SECTION III: 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.