A group of seven diverse middle school students are walking down a brightly lit school hallway. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera. The students are wearing backpacks. The hallway has yellow walls and rows of lockers on the left side.

# Next Generation Learning Models for English Language Learners

Promising Practices and Considerations for  
Teaching and Learning

WRITTEN BY:  
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PRODUCED BY:  
iNACOL

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AUGUST 2017

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The mission of the International Association for K–12 Online Learning (iNACOL) is to catalyze the transformation of K–12 education policy and practice to advance powerful, personalized, learner-centered experiences through competency-based, blended and online learning. iNACOL is a non-profit organization focusing on research, developing policy for student-centered education to ensure equity and access, developing quality standards for emerging learning models using competency-based, blended and online education, and supporting the ongoing professional development of school and district leaders for new learning models. Learn more at [www.inacol.org](http://www.inacol.org).

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## Introduction

*Next Generation Learning Models for English Language Learners* seeks to highlight the promising practices and trends in new designs to advance learning for English language learner (ELL) students. This paper is designed for practitioners, including educators and education leaders, who want to advance next generation learning models to reach every student. Our intent is to inform and empower the field with examples from schools and programs who are creating personalized, competency-based learning environments for ELL students.

Our goal is to advance knowledge of innovations in the field using new designs to improve student learning environments. We are researching and analyzing new models in schools to promote the development of students' academic, intellectual and emotional knowledge, skills and abilities through rigorous, high-quality personalized and competency-based learning models. We are examining new pathways that offer students multiple opportunities to prepare them for future success. Educators are personalizing learning in powerful ways using advanced technologies to support and serve students' unique needs. The aim of this paper is to explore early stages of innovation for new school models to better serve ELL students and provide recommendations and lessons learned to build knowledge in the field of K–12 education.

Our focus on ELL students is twofold: First, in order for next generation learning models to realize its promise, we must take responsibility for ensuring that every student benefits by mastering the skills they need to succeed, and that every student, no matter their background or primary language, is learning, progressing, and on their way to building the competencies required for college and careers. Second, ELL students are the fastest growing and largest student subgroup in our public schools today, yet the traditional education system has left many of these students behind. We have an imperative to pursue learning models, such as next generation learning models, that can transform teaching and learning for these students.

ELL students are a highly heterogeneous and complex group of students with diverse gifts, educational needs, backgrounds, languages and goals. This diversity is an asset. However, our one-size-fits-all traditional education model is struggling to adapt. ELL students have long been provided with these one-size-fits-all educational programs and services and the results show that old models have done little to close the achievement gap between ELL and non-ELL students. Almost 20 percent of ELL students do not graduate on time, and about 40 percent of ELLs are placed in remediation classes upon leaving the K–12 system.<sup>1</sup>

We have the opportunity to help all ELL students succeed, reverse the trend and close the achievement gap between ELL and non-ELL students. As the number of ELL students continues to grow in the U.S., education programs face an imperative to improve achievement for these students. Education programs must recalibrate to become more student-centered. Learner-centered teaching and learning is necessary to better serve students with diverse backgrounds and skill sets. Not one approach may work for all ELL students; however, competency-based education and personalized learning approaches hold promise for meeting students' needs no matter where they are in their learning. Next generation learning models need to be designed to embrace the diversity of ELL students, provide innovations in support of equity and transform learning for all students by supporting ELL students toward mastery in language development, literacy, social-emotional and academic knowledge, skills and dispositions.

## Background

A competency-based education system holds profound possibilities for transforming learning for ELL students. Competency-based education seeks to meet students where they are, which requires a reconfiguration of old education systems and practices to put students at the center of the learning process. For ELL students, this means factors such as their cultures, backgrounds, languages, prior knowledge, and development needs are used to inform pedagogy. Educators must understand where students are coming from, both culturally and academically, in order to provide the instruction and support these students need. Competency-based education is a structural change from fixed mindset to growth mindset. It is time-based and is organized to focus on delivering content. Traditional grading systems depend on extrinsic motivation and have high variability in how teachers determine proficiency. In contrast, competency-based education is designed to help students successfully master skills at every step, year after year, by ensuring they advance after they demonstrate proficiency. In competency-based systems, students develop and apply a broad set of skills and dispositions and build intrinsic motivation to always give their best efforts. Aligned assessments are rooted in the cycle of learning.

Many education programs focus solely on remediating ELL students to transition from their primary language to English. Often, learning structures and mindsets in the traditional education system continue to hold ELL students back. To the extent that ELL students are framed as deficient in English language, many programs tend to overlook other aspects of their learning crucial to student success. This is reflective of a deficit perspective rather than understanding the diverse language capabilities and multiculturalism as significant assets. More holistic approaches – recognizing the design of new models based on the learning sciences and the importance of social-emotional learning and meeting students in their zone of proximal development – are also critical. This paper will examine ways to compare, contrast

and challenge the historic inequities (illustrated through ELL student achievement gaps) embedded in traditional structures with the values and premises of personalizing learning to meet students where they are and focus on next generation models with competency education in order to help all reach high expectations and be prepared for college and career success in the future.

## WHO ARE ELL STUDENTS?

English language learner (ELL), also referred to as English learners (EL) or “limited English proficient” (LEP), are students whose first or primary language is anything other than English and who identify as requiring assistance in school to reach English language proficiency (ELP).<sup>2</sup>

ELL students are estimated to be nearly 10 percent of the student population nationwide or roughly 4.8 million students.<sup>3</sup> This figure has more than doubled in the last few decades, and in many schools, districts and states, ELL students are an even higher percentage of the student population.<sup>4</sup> It is predicted that by 2030, 40 percent of all K–12 students will be considered ELL students.<sup>5</sup>

Despite common assumptions, a report published by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, titled *Investing in Our Next Generation*, reported that most ELL students are not new to the country, but were born in the U.S.<sup>6</sup> In fact, more than 75 percent of ELL students in grades K–5 are second- or third-generation Americans. Within the designation of “English learners” in K–12, these students represent over 400 language backgrounds; however, Spanish speakers are the fastest growing ELL population in the U.S., followed by Asians and Pacific Islanders.<sup>7</sup>

ELL students face many challenges in school, and test results show they often fall behind their non-ELL peers. According to the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress, only 6 percent of fourth-grade ELL students scored at or above proficiency reading in English, compared with 34 percent of non-ELL fourth graders.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, ELL students are less likely to graduate in four years, at a rate of approximately 63 percent compared with a national average of 82 percent. The percentage of ELL students graduating high school within four years also trails other subgroups, including students with disabilities and those who come from low-income families.<sup>9</sup> These challenges often are a result of the fact that these students did not have appropriate instruction, supports and scaffolds to help them persist.

## HOW ARE ELL STUDENTS CURRENTLY SERVED?

The classification of “English language learner” for these students is based on either a family survey of home language, students’ scores on an English Language Proficiency (ELP) assessment, or both. ELP assessments play an important role in determining student placement into, and exit from, ELL services. Additionally, language standards such as the [WIDA English Language Development Standards](#) and [Stanford’s English Language Proficiency Standards \(ELPS\)](#) are used by educators to create curriculum, inform instruction, and determine where students are in their language acquisition. English language development standards are based on four domains of learning language: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Using the ELP assessment and language standards, many programs and services for ELL students provide basic oral language content that is loosely aligned to the language standards and ELP assessments. There are two types of programs or services that are specifically designed to provide instruction and language acquisition for ELL students: sheltered English instruction and bilingual instruction.

[Sheltered English instruction](#), also known as English-only instruction, provides direct English language instruction often in a stand-alone classroom, in a program, and/or via one-on-one instructional support. English-only instruction programs include (1) English as a Second Language Programs Pullout or Collaborative, where students spend little to no time with their native language; and (2) Structured Immersion (SI), or Sheltered English Programs where students receive some time with native language, though not formal instruction.

In contrast, [bilingual instruction](#) provides students instruction in both their native language and in English. Bilingual instruction programs include (1) Early Exit or Transitional Bilingual Programs, which provide ELL students with up to three years of supplemental instruction in primary language; (2) Developmental Bilingual Education Programs, which provide ELL students with supplemental instruction in primary language through elementary school, even after becoming proficient in English; and (3) Dual-Language or Two-Way Bilingual Immersion Programs, in which ELL students continue receiving instructions in both languages throughout their school career.

While developing competence in the language(s) of instruction is important, many ELL services end once ELL students are considered competent in oral language acquisition. Whether instruction is bilingual or monolingual, literacy is the most fundamental competency for academic success. According to the [Center for Research on Education, Diversity, & Excellence \(CREDE\)](#), “everyday social language, formal academic language and subject-matter lexicons are all critical competencies for ELL student success.”<sup>10</sup> Integrating all of these components into everyday learning should not be a passive exercise for ELL students. They must participate and help drive instruction tailored to their individual needs and interests, and take an active role in defining their own educational pathways.

## WHAT ARE THE PROMISING PRACTICES FOR TEACHING ELL STUDENTS?

Research on how ELL students learn best generally covers three main categories: (1) instructional strategies, (2) learning supports and (3) assessments. When aligned, best practices in these three categories can support ELL students in overcoming variances in proficiency in their prior language and content knowledge.

Instructional strategies for ELL students include explicitly teaching academic English alongside content. Broadly speaking, [academic English](#) refers to the language needed for success in school settings. Within the fields of linguistics and education, there are a variety of approaches and definitions of academic English. Standards for academic contexts should also explicitly incorporate the kinds of language that ELL students need to learn to succeed in school, such as academic language in math, science, social studies and English language arts.

Instructional strategies also include data-driven interventions and strategic groupings or cooperative groupings, where students are grouped based on proficiency and performance levels. In cooperative learning environments, students work interdependently on group instructional tasks and learning goals. This method can encourage practicing reading and speaking in English and discussions to promote comprehension, also known as [instructional conversations](#).

Educators can use instructional tools to support ELL students in the four domains of language development. For example, specific writing adaptations can sometimes take commonly used writing prompts and graphic organizers to include academic English vocabulary and translation. These supports should take into consideration student levels in language proficiency standards, build on ELL students' prior knowledge, and provide appropriate scaffolding for these students without compromising rigor or content. For example, adaptive technologies could provide students with access to instructional content that corresponds to the student's current language level and grade level that continuously increases in word and content complexity.

Additionally, ELL students need extended time and differentiated supports based on student interests, prior learning experiences and student background. Central to teaching ELL students is the understanding and acceptance that not all students enter school at the same place in their English proficiency nor will all students progress at the same pace in their language development. Student characteristics, such as proficiency in the student's first language, the disability status of the student, and mobility and stress-related factors of the student, all play a role in how the student will access the content and pace through language development and acquisition. Having this perspective is crucial in designing learning opportunities for ELL students.



The [English Language Learner Alliance](#) at the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Northeast & Islands studied how long it takes for ELL students in New York City schools to become reclassified as proficient in the four domains of English language development depending on factors such as age, background and disability status.<sup>11</sup> The study followed NYC public school students classified as ELL students in levels one and two in their English language proficiency between 2003 and 2010. About half of students who entered kindergarten as ELL students were reclassified within four years, and students who entered in later grades took longer to become reclassified. The study shows that the time it took students to become reclassified as “former ELL” depended on a number of student characteristics, including grade of entry into schools, the initial English language proficiency at time of school entry, and the disability status of the student.

Based on students’ backgrounds, REL recommends several strategies: focusing on writing instruction, using academic vocabulary in content courses, and considering the variety of factors that impact students’ English language proficiency.

It is rare for students to reach fluency within a year or two of English immersion. Based on research on developing language across content<sup>12</sup> by the CREDE, students beginning to learn the language can make what appears to be fairly rapid progress, but then slow down once they reach intermediate proficiency. To reach full proficiency, students need early interventions, explicit instruction, and practice in academic English. Effective strategies to reaching full proficiency include teaching students to read in their first language, which promotes higher levels of reading achievement in English; and, when instructing ELL students in English, modifying teacher instruction to take into account students’ language limitations. These strategies show the importance of knowing where students are in their learning and then taking appropriate steps to meet students where they are. This requires educators to be well-versed in English language development and responsive to students’ needs or next steps. In other words, putting students at the center of their learning.

Because ELL students come from a wide variety of languages, skills and backgrounds, no uniform solution, tool or process exists that will impact the learning of ELL students in the exact same way. Research, however, points to the need for integrating English language with content learning to provide holistic instruction and accurate assessments and feedback in student learning.<sup>13</sup>

CREDE research on language development suggests that educators can help ELL students bridge the gap in learning the English language and content knowledge through explicitly teaching academic vocabulary and literacy.<sup>14</sup> According to research from [Center for Public Education](#), the three main areas of language and literacy development for ELL students are as follows:<sup>15</sup>

- » **English language proficiency** (ELP) refers to the ability to speak, read, write and comprehend the English language in general. ELP assessments measure four domains of language: reading, speaking, listening and writing.
- » **Academic English proficiency** refers specifically to the ability to speak, read, write and comprehend academic English, which is characterized by academic and content-specific vocabulary, complex sentence structure and the process of academic discourse (e.g., interpretation and analysis of data or text).
- » **Content mastery** refers to students' ability to demonstrate mastery of subject-area knowledge on academic measures.

It is not enough to measure one of these three learning areas. Each must be explicitly taught, measured and tracked in tandem with each ELL student's progress.<sup>16</sup> For example, reaching ELP and becoming reclassified as English proficient is not indicative of how ready ELL students are to succeed in English-only classrooms or programs without additional support, how long it takes for them to achieve proficiency in academic English, or how long it takes for these students to perform well on academic content achievement measures.

## Next Generation Learning Models for ELL Students

Next generation learning models hold promise for transforming education for every student by providing a personalized, student-centered approach to learning. This section will compare the challenges of the traditional education system in supporting ELL students to how new learning models based on learning sciences and student mastery can improve learning outcomes for all.

### CHALLENGES OF THE CURRENT EDUCATION MODEL TO MEET THE NEEDS OF ELL STUDENTS

The previous sections presented research on the current practices and best practices in teaching ELL students. Recurring challenges in implementing best practices in the classroom depend on time, resources, educator training, and perhaps more significantly, on the current structures of a traditional school model that is based on an outdated frame of educating ELL students. Traditional education models teach ELL students based on narrow goals for student success tied to testing, one-size-fits-all pedagogy, and fixed, deficient-based mindsets on the skills and abilities of these students.

**Teaching based on narrow goals for English language proficiency:** Most current models for ELL students focus solely on the goal for students to achieve rapid transition from their primary language to English. The problem with this goal is that it narrowly defines achievement for these students from a deficit-based perspective. Students who enter educational programs with a primary language other than English are usually defined as lacking English language skills, resulting in students regarded as being deficient in the critical skills that are necessary for academic success in the traditional education system. As a result, most educational programs, sheltered English instruction in particular, that serve ELL students are framed to remediate and repair this learning deficiency.<sup>17</sup> Many ELL programs and services have made “reclassification” or moving students towards English language proficiency status as the chief objective to the exclusion of most other academic content and literacy instruction.

This old framework simply isn’t working. Students who exit ELL services as English language proficient still have achievement outcomes lower than their non-ELL peers.

**Assessing students with summative tests that don’t provide a complete picture of learning for ELL students:** Current models for teaching ELL students are framed by two types of assessments: subject-matter assessments and ELP Assessment. The classification of “ELL” student and reclassification of “English proficient” is based on student performance on the four domains of English language development and assessed by ELP assessments. As these assessments only focus on language development, ELL students may become reclassified as English proficient yet still fall behind in their academic courses, leading to additional monitoring and accountability measures. Thus, most English proficiency assessments have not been good predictors of student success on literacy and content-area assessments in English over time. This intersects with problems arising from ELL students’ performance on subject-matter assessments. ELL students’ low performance on summative content assessments fuels the belief that these students are deficient in fundamental language and literacy skills and need remediation. ELP assessments are framed by the narrow goal of transiting ELL students to English proficiency while subject-matter assessments provide an incomplete picture of these students’ learning due to language barriers.

**Supporting ELL students based on one-size-fits-all learning models:** ELLs are a diverse subgroup of students whose range of backgrounds and prior learning experiences are often lost in sheltered instruction models and during assimilation into general English-only academic courses. While bilingual and dual-language learning models can provide students with asset-based pedagogy and integrate content with language curriculum, there is more that can be done to meet ELL students where they are. Instruction should be scaffolded based on students’ prior learning experiences, current English language development levels, and student learning goals. Education programs should also consider other factors, such as student background and preferences, when designing learning experiences for ELL students.

**Siloed educator roles for serving ELL students:** In many ELL programs, the roles of ELL and general education teachers are often siloed with ELL educators focusing solely on language acquisition and general education teachers focusing on academic content. Collaborative teaching environments in which educators work with learners across language acquisition, literacy, academic content and competencies, would better support ELL students.

**Limited educator capacity and preparation:** According to an Education Week Research Center survey, nearly 5 million children in U.S. public schools are learning the English language, yet only one-third of district-level leaders believe educators in their schools are prepared to effectively teach ELL students.<sup>18</sup> There is a shortage of educators with the appropriate training in ELL teaching methods and cultural competency. This is particularly acute in regions with few ELL students or where there are difficulties recruiting qualified ELL staff. Additionally, educators need training in cultural competency and ELL instructional methods so they understand how to support ELL students.

## CORE PRINCIPLES FOR NEXT GENERATION LEARNING MODELS TO SUPPORT ELL STUDENT SUCCESS

With next generation learning models, educators can provide students with powerful, personalized learning experiences that best meet the unique needs of each student. These models have the potential to deepen learning for ELL students and help them succeed through new learning designs that offer personalized instructional approaches and competency-based pathways. Let's examine some core principles and early trends in the design of new learning models that are personalized and competency-based.

What are core elements and principles you might expect to see in a next generation classroom to support ELL student success?

**Redefining success for ELL students:** In next generation learning models, we are seeing a move away from and beyond narrowly defining success for ELL students as transitioning from students' primary language to proficiency in English. In a competency-based education system, students move toward mastery of both English and/or dual-language literacy and academic content, as well as important skills and dispositions needed to ensure success in college and careers.

**Assessments of and for learning for ELL students:** Next generation learning models focus on assessments that measure student performance not in comparison with non-ELL students but against articulated, high expectations of success and clear depictions for what success looks like. Further, a stronger focus on formative assessments along with summative assessments offer a balance of assessments of and for learning to continuously provide educators and ELL students data on where students are in their learning and inform next steps on students' progress toward mastery.



**Personalized approaches that focus on educating the whole child:** Next generation learning models provide ELL students with comprehensive supports and services that are focused on whole-child learning and development. This approach takes into account the students' backgrounds, cultures, prior learning experiences and learning preferences, among other considerations. Personalized approaches meet students where they are and allow for developing multiple pathways for learning that take into account students interests, passion and background. Competency-based progressions ensure a student demonstrates mastery with evidence of a performance of their learning before advancing to the next unit or lesson. This learning is holistic and recognizes the broader set of 21st-century skills and dispositions in addition to content knowledge.

**Building educator role and capacity:** To meet the needs of every student in a competency-based education system, there must be a focus on increasing educator capacity in terms of using best practices in personalized learning strategies and culturally responsive teaching for ELL students. Additionally, the role of educators needs to increase to provide both content and language instruction and scaffolds to expand access and support learning for ELL students. Assessment literacy is crucial for educators to select the appropriate assessment and build capacity in performance assessment and reliability in scoring consistently on proficiency scales. In sum, building educator capacity for next generation models to serve ELL students is a big lift. Similarly, ELL coordinators and educators need to work with content educators to provide instruction that takes into account students' language development levels and learning goals. The focus is on student-centered curriculum, instruction and assessment that allows learning environments to meet students where they are and keep them on track toward successful outcomes.

## COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION FOR ELL STUDENTS

Designing new learning environments based on ensuring every student reaches mastery of the knowledge, skills and dispositions is critical. What is competency-based education and why does it matter for rethinking instruction to better serve all students?

*CompetencyWorks* worked with 100 leading innovators in the field to develop a five-part working definition of competency-based education, which describes the design elements:

- » Students advance upon demonstrated mastery.
- » Competencies include explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower students.
- » Assessment is meaningful and a positive learning experience for students.
- » Students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs.
- » Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include application and creation of knowledge along with the development of important skills and dispositions.<sup>19</sup>

This definition of competency-based education refers to a systems model in which teaching and learning are designed to ensure students are becoming proficient by advancing on demonstrated mastery and that schools are designed to provide differentiated supports to meet the needs of every student. It is valuable to determine how competency-based education can transform the learning environment and expectations for ELL students:

**Competency-Based Education and Designing for English Language Learners**

Definition design elements for competency-based education systems	ELL considerations	Competency-based education system for ELL students
Students advance upon demonstrated mastery.	Education programs serving ELL students need to meet every learner where they are, in both academic content and language development, and make sure they grow and progress.	ELL students receive the time, instruction, strategies and supports, as needed, to reach mastery in language development, literacy and academic content.
Competencies include explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower students.	ELL students benefit from the integration of content standards and language development standards and tools to help them access content learning objectives.	Competencies for ELL students include those for language, literacy and academic content.
Assessment is meaningful and a positive learning experience for students.	Assessments generate feedback for ELL students and provide next steps in language development and content learning objectives.	Assessments for ELL students are ongoing, aligned with both English language development standards and academic standards.
Students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs.	Instructions, supports, interventions take into account ELL students' entry points (language development level, prior knowledge, etc.).	ELL students receive targeted feedback and strategies based on their specific language and academic learning needs.
Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include application and creation of knowledge, along with the development of important skills and dispositions.	Definition of student success is broadened for ELL students to include language, academic and lifelong learning skills.	In addition to enhancing students' language, literacy and academic learning, ELL students also receive support in the skills and dispositions essential to success.

## PERSONALIZED LEARNING TO SUPPORT ELL STUDENTS IN A COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION SYSTEM

Personalized learning can serve as a powerful and crucial pedagogical approach to realize the potential of providing teaching and learning based on learning sciences research for how students learn best. Competency-based education is an undergirding structure to help assure that education programs will focus on mastery and provide interventions and supports for ensuring students reach proficiency and mastery; and, personalized learning is built on competency-based progressions as an overall approach on how to best meet each student's needs and meet students where they are. Personalized learning allows students to experience the personalized instructional approaches based on how, when and where they learn best and to have multiple pathways to make progress on learning goals "per person" – with the same high standards and expectations for all students to ensure equity.

*Personalized learning “is tailoring learning for each student’s strengths, needs, and interests -- including enabling student voice and choice in what, how, when, and where they learn -- to provide flexibility and supports to ensure mastery of the highest standards possible.”<sup>20</sup>*

*In a personalized learning environment, learners have agency to set their own goals for learning, create a reflective process during their journey to attain those goals, and be flexible enough to take their learning outside the confines of the traditional classroom.*

Personalized learning focuses on meeting students where they are and providing the individualized supports and strategies each student needs to progress to the next learning objective. In schools using personalized learning, students are active learners in choosing how they learn and have voice to co-create learning experiences, personalize their learning pathways, and develop the lifelong learning skills they need to be self-directed learners.

In competency-based education systems for ELL students, personalized learning caters to the learning needs of each student with respect to their background and entry points in English and content standards. In part, this includes the need to identify the English language development level of the ELL student and then focus on providing targeted instruction and assessment based on the student's background, proficiency levels, learning preferences and learning goals. Education programs can co-create learning pathways for ELL students that take into consideration student background, literacy and language development levels, content knowledge, and other factors. It is important all students are held to the same high standards and expectations to ensure equity and rigor.

## Case Studies: Promising Practices in the Field Serving ELL Students with Next Generation Learning Models

The field of K–12 education is in early stages of designing new, next generation learning models that hold promise for better meeting the needs of all students. This early research is focused on how schools are beginning to innovate, how their approaches are aligned to the research on how students learn best, and specifically, how ELL students learn best. While these next generation models are nascent and most are fewer than ten years in implementation, our goal is to provide examples of case studies of how the field is beginning to take hold and suggest lessons learned for the evolution forward.

The following case studies represent promising practices in the field using personalized, competency-based learning specifically for ELL students. These case studies are considered promising in that they incorporate many of the core principles for next generation learning to support ELL student success. All are examples of programs taking a longer view and a more holistic approach to student outcomes over time -- defining the goal as helping students to achieve at high levels over the course of their schooling -- in addition to becoming English-proficient.

Each case study will address the core principles for next generation learning for ELL students that were discussed above:

- » Redefining success for ELL students.
- » Assessments of and for learning.
- » Personalized learning approaches.
- » Building educator role and capacity.

### INTERNATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL AT LANGLEY PARK

*International Network for Public Schools*

*Location: Bladensburg, MD*

*Grades Served: 9–10*

The [International High School in Langley Park](#) (IHSLP) is a part of the [Internationals Network for Public Schools](#) that supports primarily ELL students through learning models focused on collaboration, communication and continuous feedback. IHSLP opened in 2015 to bring personalized, competency-based education to roughly 400 ELL students in the Prince George's County School District. Over 200 students, all classified as ELL, currently attend IHSLP, and many are considered newcomer students. The school plans to continue enrolling 100 more students per year over the next two years, adding an additional grade as the school grows.



The Internationals Schools' approach to teaching and learning serves ELL students by explicitly teaching the skills and knowledge ELL students need to master language acquisition, literacy and academic content.

The Internationals Network for Public Schools supports 22 campuses across the U.S. to serve the learning needs of ELL students. Each campus collaborates with district and community members to design a school that will meet the specific needs of students within the community. For example, in designing IHSLP, school leaders used family surveys to assess the ELL student population within the district and partnered with community organizations to provide specialized services for students and parents. While each Internationals school campus could differ in the specific courses and services it provides, there are common elements implemented throughout the network of schools. This includes standard-based mastery learning and grading, culturally-responsive teaching, social-emotional learning, competency objectives and personalized learning approaches.

IHSLP follows the Internationals Network pedagogical approach to educating ELLs' **five core principles**: heterogeneity and collaboration, experiential learning, language and content integration, localized autonomy and responsibility, and one learning model for all. This educational process takes place in a heterogeneous, learner-centered, collaborative and activity-based environment. Students are organized in diverse clusters mixed according to age, grade, academic ability, prior schooling, native language and language development levels.

**Redefining success of ELL students:** IHSLP takes a holistic approach to student learning, providing students with learning goals beyond English language proficiency to include academic content, literacy and social-emotional learning. IHSLP created its own curriculum based on language development standards and state content standards to arrive at the skills and competencies ELL students should know and be able to do. IHSLP's curriculum embeds academic vocabulary, providing students with the strategic vocabulary they need to access English instruction and content. Additionally, social-emotional learning objectives are also taught explicitly, helping nurture dispositions that support lifelong learning and student success.

**Assessment of and for learning:** IHSLP has a system of ongoing assessments that inform student learning progress toward their language development and content learning goals. Daily assessments based on learning objectives that incorporate language acquisition, literacy, content skills and knowledge, and social-emotional objectives provide a quick snapshot of student learning in each one of these areas. Additionally, weekly performance assessments include larger tasks and provide a more in-depth picture of each student's learning progress. These formative assessments allow educators to provide individual students with the acceleration or intervention they need based on their areas of strengths and weaknesses.

**Personalized learning approaches:** IHSLP provides some flexible pacing, extended learning time and continuous engagement with peers and educators to support student learning. IHSLP developed what it calls “Acceleration, Collaboration, and Engagement” model to provide flexibility in pacing for ELL students.

- » **Acceleration:** Students have choice in which learning objectives and courses they want to focus on at least one day per week. This flexible learning day allows students to work independently or in small groups with educators, spend more time in areas they need more practice in, or accelerate their learning by advancing to their next learning goal and objective.
- » **Collaboration:** Students work in cooperative learning groups and teams to allow for peer practice and support in content and language.
- » **Engagement:** Interventions and supports are provided at a small group or individual level to students who need additional time and engagement to master the material.

**Educator role and capacity:** Every teacher at IHSLP is responsible for teaching language as well as content. Educators at IHSLP improve their practice to better serve their ELL student population through weekly professional development sessions, one-on-one practice with an instructional coach, and monthly cross-campus visits to observe other educators in practice at other Internationals School campuses. Educators receive personalized learning plans with an instructional coach and work on individual goals based on educators’ strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, educators receive targeted supports from their instructional coaches that model what learning strategies should look like for students. The Internationals’ approach acknowledges “put another way, the model for adult learning and student learning mirror each other.”<sup>21</sup>

## **DISTINCTIVE SCHOOLS: CICS WEST BELDEN, CICS BUCKTOWN, MINNESOTA EXCELLENCE IN LEARNING ACADEMY**

*Location: Chicago, IL, and Brooklyn Park, MN*

*Grades Served: K–8 and K–2*

**Distinctive Schools** is a non-profit charter management organization that manages four schools in partnership with Chicago International Charter Schools (CICS) in Chicago, IL. Two of those CICS schools are featured below. Distinctive also manages Minnesota Excellence for Learning Academy in Brooklyn Park, MN. Distinctive Schools support the design and implementation of personalized learning within the schools they manage using a bilingual rotation model. The following are background information and highlights from some of the Distinctive managed campuses.

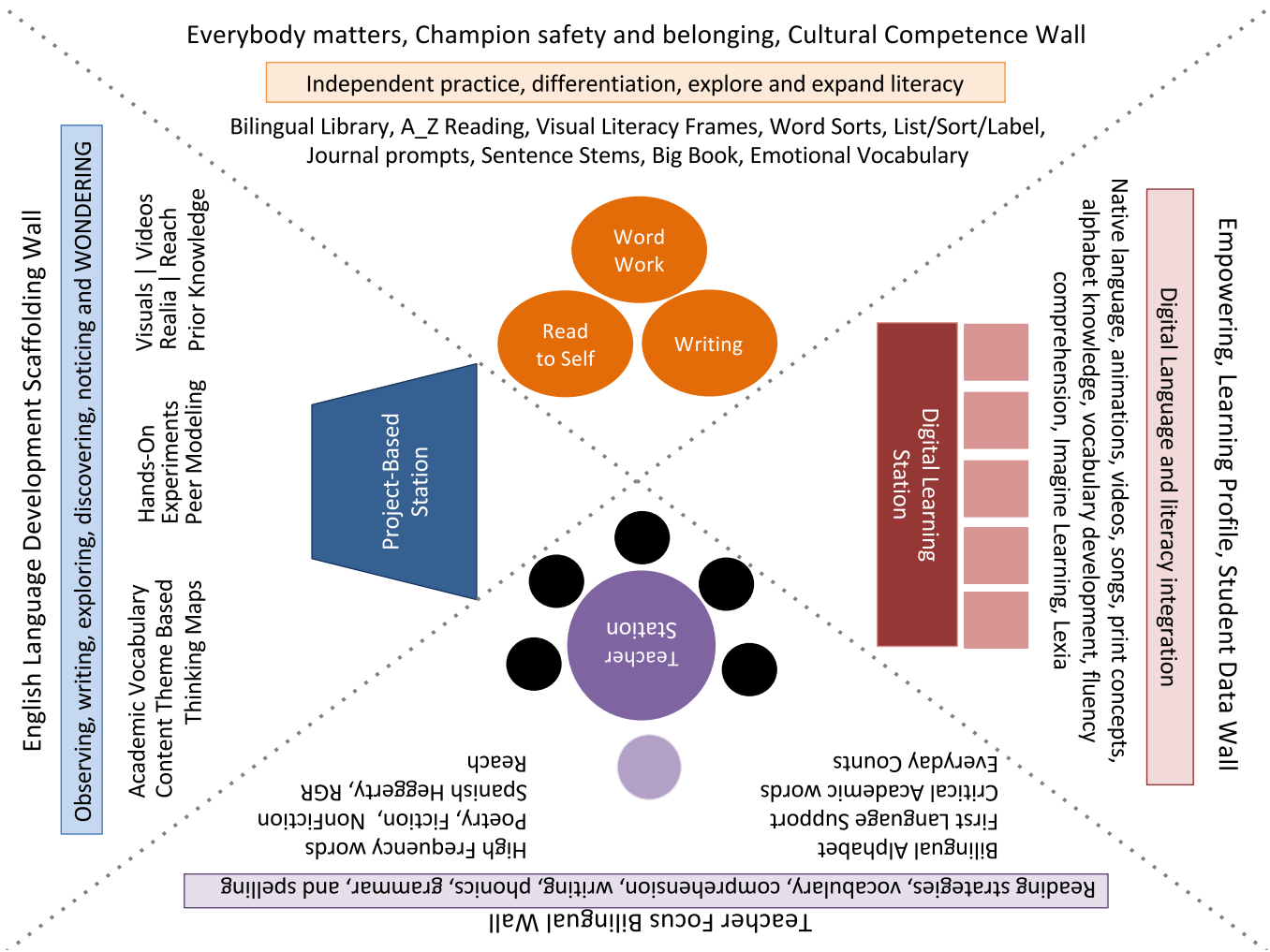
- » **CICS West Belden:** West Belden, managed by Distinctive Schools, is a K-8 elementary and middle school campus with roughly 500 students, of which 200 students are classified as ELL students with Spanish as their primary language. West Belden provides personalized learning strategies including flexible learning environments, learner profiles, personalized learning plans, competency-based progression and technology-enhanced instruction with curricular approaches to encourage students' success and growth. The school has created two multi-age classrooms to foster student learning at their own pace. West Belden's bilingual kindergarten teachers encourage students to use English and Spanish to make meaning. Students are learning in both languages with biliteracy skills embedded into every learning objective.
- » **CICS Bucktown:** Bucktown, managed by Distinctive Schools, is a K-8 elementary and middle school campus with 688 students, of which 118 are classified as ELL students with Spanish as their primary language. Multi-age students are grouped together and are provided supports from content and ELL co-teachers. Bucktown aims to inspire and support each child's physical, social, emotional and academic learning for success at school and beyond using a personalized learning approach. In order to educate the "whole child," beyond content and language instruction, Bucktown also embeds social-emotional competencies in the curriculum.
- » **Minnesota Excellence in Learning Academy (MELA):** MELA is a K-3 elementary school in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, that uses a personalized and bilingual learning model for ELL students. MELA enrolls 200 students of which 50 are classified as ELL students from a diversity of languages and backgrounds. At MELA, ELL teachers receive independent collaboration time and professional development. Teachers rotate during their professional development to meet with ELL teachers and discuss ways to improve their instruction to reach their ELL students. Within its personalized model, language and content teachers work together to support every learner, switching from one language to another.

**Redefining success for ELL students:** Distinctive Schools focuses on literacy skills in both English and ELL students' primary language(s). Their school design is intentional about providing a climate that promotes ELL students' voice and choice in what language they prioritize learning while supporting literacy and academic content.

**Assessment of and for learning:** Students are provided a variety of formative and summative assessments to determine their learning levels. Educators focus instruction and supports based on student language domains and provide ongoing feedback in response to student assessments.

**Personalized learning approaches:** Distinctive Schools uses a bilingual rotation classroom model that utilizes need-based flexible grouping, even among different classrooms with language and content supports, word walls, environmental print, libraries and student work in their primary language and in English.

## Distinctive Schools' English Learner Station Rotation Model<sup>22</sup>



Distinctive Schools implements a common strategy of language integration within the Personalized Learning model based on:

- » Learner profiles.
- » Language standard assessment.
- » Cultural background.
- » Student and parent choice in student's language and literacy focus.



**Learner Profiles:** Within a student's learner profile, learning strengths and challenges are identified. In addition to student strengths, needs, and motivations, teachers collaborate to determine each student's language development levels, with relevant information related to where the student was born and his or her linguistic, cultural and academic analysis from language perspectives. Opportunities are embedded to reflect on students' affective factors from language learning such as student motivation and attitude toward English or bilingual education and personal histories.

**Personalized Learning Paths:** Personalized learning paths are designed to meet the learning goals and needs of each learner. Personalized learning paths can lead to a redefinition and new understanding of lifelong learning to include both formal and informal goals. When students are setting their goals, Distinctive Schools teachers are trained to consider effective language learning strategies. The types of experiences that are discussed involve strategies that play a major role with regard to success in language classes, such as how language learners set their own language goals and how they monitor their success to have a strong drive to communicate as equal to their monolingual pairs. This type of analysis helps teachers drive students to more attainable goals and feel motivated. Distinctive Schools uses a language learner profile tool to add school formative assessment and create specific student language goals, personalize progress reports for parents based on language domains selected, and give teachers student goals that can be applied in the classroom and serve as intervention practices to evaluate.

**Competency-Based Progressions:** Competency-based progressions is where each student's progress toward clearly defined goals is continually assessed and a student advances and earns credit as soon as he/she demonstrates mastery. Assessment and ongoing monitoring is key for Distinctive Schools. Based on the numbers of language learners, all data is analyzed from a language acquisition perspective, including linguistic accommodations per student per domain aligned to fixed and variable formative assessment expectations.

**Flexible Environment for Personalization:** Distinctive Schools provides flexible learning environments that offer rotations, project-based stations, teacher one-on-one support and small group instruction. Additionally, multiple supports for ELL students, including some individualized pull-out supports and an emphasis on ELL teachers pulling in or co-teaching so ELL students don't have to leave their inclusive learning environments. Lessons are adjusted based on the student's proficiency. Newcomer students receive more resources and strategies through their rotations.

ELL students of different ages and/or grade levels are combined in the same class while ELL teachers rotate in classrooms to provide language support. Creative staffing is integral to personalized learning and adequate support for language acquisition. All teachers' lessons are differentiated to ensure that each ELL student receives instruction appropriate to his or her age or grade. Content material is bilingual, Spanish and English, teachers rotate per classrooms and/or students move based on their rotational learner path. Language plays a fundamental role within the school environment, where students navigate in familiar settings with bilingual word walls and the classroom library.

**Educator role and capacity:** Distinctive Schools' biliteracy components incorporate all ELL teaching instructional models, assessment and resources used for language development. Content area instructors also provide language acquisition instructional strategies, linked to curriculum maps and aligned to Distinctive Schools' teaching framework. Distinctive Schools educators work with content teachers to map out learning goals for ELL students. Courses are co-taught between content and ELL educators. Teachers collaborate on creating language and content objectives weekly, such as preparing to teach sentence stems and vocabulary that are appropriate for students' proficiency levels and academic language. ELL and bilingual teachers also work on their own personalized learning growth plans with strategies they need to improve. Their growth plans are reviewed with instructional coaches. Professional learning communities provide support and collaboration on common strengths and challenges teachers are having in the classroom. Professional development and personalized growth plans and coaching help educators at Distinctive Schools improve in their craft to better serve all of their students.

## UCLA PROJECT EXC-EL SCHOOLS

*Location: Ossining High School, Ossining, NY*

*Grades Served: Middle and high school*

In 2015, Project Exc-EL was created by English language researchers and educators at UCLA Center X to provide instructional supports to ELL educators. They have two projects that focus on using Dynamic Language Learning Progressions (DLLP) to assist educators in meeting ELL students where they are in their language and content learning. Project Exc-EL schools are characterized by (1) the use of student data to drive instruction, (2) the focus on personalized structures and supports, and (3) the inclusion of community partners.

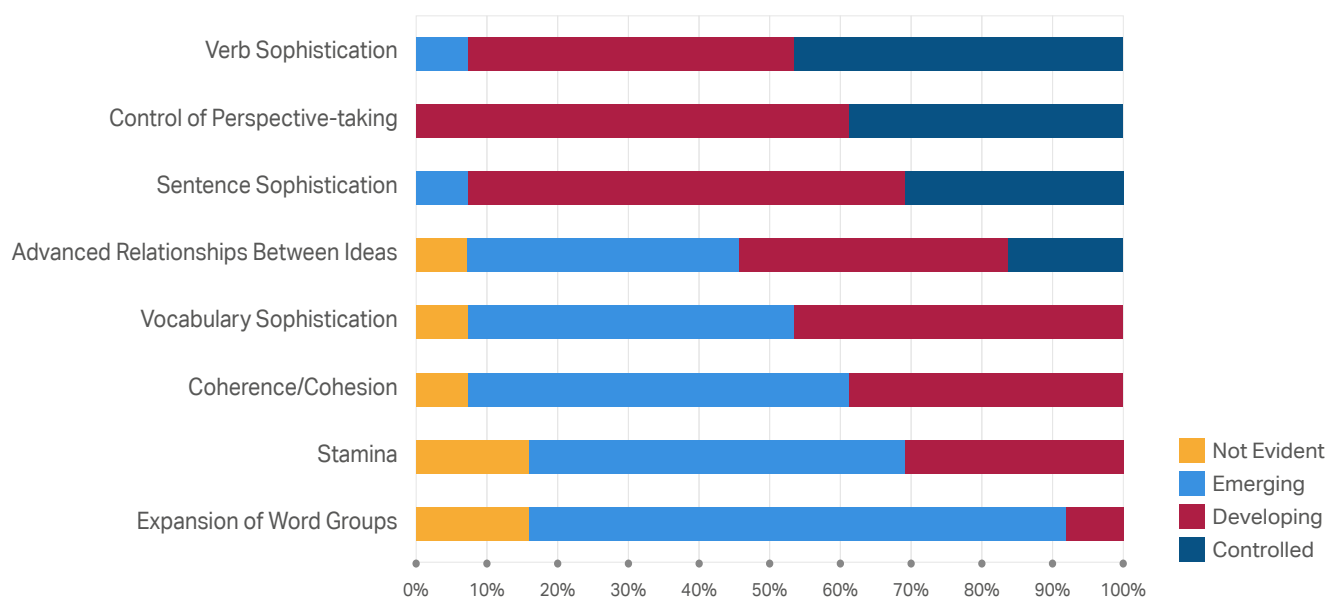
[Ossining High School](#) in New York is one of the Project Exc-EL schools that is implementing its work on dynamic language learning progressions. Ossining enrolls 1,468 students, 51 percent of whom are economically disadvantaged with 140 students classified as ELLs. The school provides culturally responsive pathways for its emerging bilingual students. In the co-teaching model, an ELL teacher and a content area teacher co-plan, co-teach and co-assess students as they fully participate in classes with native English speakers. DLLP is used by language and content educators to plan, assess and determine where ELL students are in their learning. Additionally, the school provides accelerated instruction that integrates literacy and content learning for students with low literacy skills or interrupted formal education.

**Redefining success for ELL students:** The work of Project Exc-EL schools for ELL students began with examining the role of standards in schools. Researchers at UCLA wanted to know what kind of language expectations ELL students should meet in order to learn, for example, a math standard. The researchers developed DLLP to first help educators develop the strategies to unpack the skills and assumptions being asked by standards, and second, to provide a tool that can accurately gauge the language and content knowledge and development for ELL students.

DLLP was created after considering student needs in vocabulary, sentence and development phases and different types of language domains. There are seven feature areas that teachers can focus on to determine a “best fit” in terms of students’ current skill, knowledge and competency in that content as it relates to their language. Rubrics based on DLLP performance descriptions assess proficiency in four different categories: “Not Evident,” “Emerging,” “Developing,” and “Controlled,” distinguishing between what ELL students can currently demonstrate via verbal and written explanations in their language development and what they need to do next to grow.

The **High-leverage language features**<sup>23</sup> identify eight key characteristics, or key features related to words, sentences and discourse. Among these features are: verb sophistication, control of perspective-taking, sentence sophistication, advanced relationships between ideas, vocabulary sophistication, coherence/cohesion, stamina, and expansion of word groups.

### High Leverage Language Features – Example of Third-grade English Learners’ Order of Emergence



(Adapted from Bailey, 2017)

The **Cross-cutting DLLP Performance Descriptions**<sup>24</sup> illustrate how performance is described at each phase of the progression for features.

### Cross-cutting DLLP Performance Descriptions

DLLP Not Evident	DLLP Emerging	DLLP Developing	DLLP Controlled
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Feature not yet detectable (or not used productively)</li><li>• Student explanation is in a language other than English</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Feature appears infrequently/intermittently or largely incomplete</li><li>• Feature may be used accurately or inaccurately (errors or omissions)*</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Feature appears more often or more complete</li><li>• Feature may be used accurately or inaccurately (errors or omissions)*</li><li>• A small "repertoire" for the feature is evident</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Feature appears complete</li><li>• Feature is most often used accurately</li><li>• A broad "repertoire" for the feature is evident</li></ul>

\* Language may be "flawed" production during these acquisition stages (Valdes, 2005)



(Bailey, 2015 and Bailey, Chang, & Heritage, 2015)

**Assessment of and for learning:** The DLLP process requires ongoing formative assessments and using data gathered to inform student learning and next steps. Project Exc-EL schools focus on student self-assessment and uses student-led conferences in student portfolios. The researchers worked to provide examples of what level student work should look like for oral and written work. Currently, there is a professional development and training lab based in California that focuses on developing teacher professional judgment on calibration and instruction using DLLP.

**Personalized learning approaches:** DLLPs provide educators with information on where ELL students are on their four language learning domains, as well as their academic content learning. Educators are trained to respond to student responses and plan lessons and assessments based on each student's unique language learning progression. Personalizing learning through use of instructional strategies to meet students where they are is central to the work of DLLP.

**Educator role and capacity:** Educators use DLLP and content configurations to determine students' levels in current language and content. Teachers use clearly calibrated rubrics and exemplars of student work to determine "best fit" of a student's language development and content level. This helps educators determine where students are in their learning, map next steps in response to students' learning progression, and target supports and services to individual student learning needs.



Project Exc-EL focuses on developing their educator's capacity to understand where students are in their learning development to scaffold instruction to best fit the needs of each learner. Content and ELL educators are encouraged to focus on holistic measurements of student performance based on multiple pieces of evidence. Using DLLP to guide student work, student answers and responses are not tied to a specific prompt from a teacher or dependent on familiarity on specific learning objectives. Teachers learn to scaffold with an understanding of where students should be on their language and content learning continuum based on written work, explanations and verbal expressions. Student explanations and work product provides the teacher with a selection of learning progressions that the student could take, depending on which answer they give. Further, teachers must analyze data on where student learning is to drive interventions and provide differentiated instructional strategies and learning tools and materials to provide ELL students with the opportunities they need to advance toward the next learning goal. This practice requires a growth mindset on behalf of educators to build on their craft to personalize instruction for ELL students.

***Teachers must analyze data on where student learning is to drive interventions and provide differentiated instructional strategies and learning tools and materials to provide ELL students with the opportunities they need to advance toward the next learning goal. This practice requires a growth mindset on behalf of educators to build on their craft to personalize instruction for ELL students.***

Project Exc-EL's DLLP began through the effort of educators to explore the multiple ways ELL students learn across academic content, language acquisition and literacy. The work of DLLP really supports educators in personalizing learning for ELL students by creating a method for educators to determine where ELL students are in their language and content learning.

## LINDSAY HIGH SCHOOL

*Lindsay Unified School District*

*Location: Lindsay, CA*

*Grades Served: 9–12*

[Lindsay Unified School District \(LUSD\)](#) has a student population of 13,000. Nearly half of LUSD's students are classified as ELL students, and over 80 percent qualify for free and reduced lunch. LUSD is also becoming a national model for personalized, competency-based education. LUSD uses a performance-based learning system which allows educators to provide early interventions and know exactly where

students are in their academic journey and how they are progressing. Within LUSD, [Lindsay High School](#) (LHS) implemented a competency-based education model that focuses on advancing student mastery and student agency. Over 30 percent of students at LHS are ELL students.

**Redefining success for ELL students:** School leaders are building capacity for every teacher to support literacy across the curriculum. LHS supports literacy throughout the school day with independent practice time for verbal and writing skills. LHS integrates academic vocabulary and intensive personalized support for its ELL students in all content areas. English learning facilitators are lifting up vocabulary, using sentence frames and graphic organizers, and doing writing prompts. For example, math teachers ask students to write about their process in solving a math problem. Students are also encouraged to show their English learning facilitators evidence from other classes of their skills in writing. The effort to build capacity to teach literacy across the curriculum is benefiting more than the ELL students.

LHS has also added a strategy to respond to incoming new students who are behind in academic content and are at emerging and expanding English skills. LHS offers ELL students self-contained classrooms of 20 students supported by literacy specialists. Some are socially and emotionally ready for high school, while some are transfer students who need substantial help to get their foundational skills to high school level. Educators ask that these students continue working in the middle school until they're ready to move on. LHS has the capacity to serve 40 to 45 students who need this intensive support. The minute they are showing readiness for the full academic day, they are transitioned to high school.

LHS is investing in more summer intervention, which is different in a performance-based system because educators know where every student is every day and do not allow a student to fail an entire course over a semester of a year in a competency-based system. Students are able to focus on the specific measurement topics they need help with so they don't have to retake the entire course. Some students want to come during the summer to receive additional support, or they just need a bit more time before advancing forward to the next course. For ELL students, summer intervention is an opportunity to accelerate the process of building their skills.

**Assessments of and for learning:** LHS focuses on making learning targets explicit and accessible. The school provides rubrics, exemplars and other models to students know when they have met the learning target. There are more ways than one for students to demonstrate their learning beyond taking standardized or written tests. Students are provided with opportunities to show their learning through performance tasks, formative assessments, project-based learning outcomes and more. LUSD uses criterion-referenced standards as reference points for scoring. Assessment results and scores are measured against a performance level.

**Personalized learning approaches:** LHS focuses on a performance-based learning system in which every student progresses through learning standards at their own pace, and there are clear indicators of where each student is across the various domains of knowledge, skills and dispositions toward graduation. For example, teachers know whether a student from one of LUSD's elementary schools is entering with higher math skills but is still struggling with writing in English. They know how to identify students who need extra supports or coaching because their self-directed lifelong learner skills aren't well-developed yet.

Additionally, educators and school leaders at LHS are more thoughtful about how they think about pace and learning trajectories. Students who need to cover more learning during the four years of high school may want to accelerate their pace of learning or take advantage of the summer to keep learning. Other students may need to work during the summer or feel that the best they can do is one academic level per year of growth. LHS has to discuss the potential that some ELL students may end up being in high school for a fifth year in order to ensure they are fully proficient. LHS's work is uncovering challenges and opportunities in the trade-offs between pace, amount of learning per year, and the steepness of the trajectory.

Additionally, students have voice and choice and can take responsibility for allocating their time between self-directed learning spaces and educator-led instruction, depending on preferences and their own readiness. LHS tracks student learning over time so educators (as well as parents and students) can see how incoming students have performed in past trajectories and where they are currently. Educators look at the performance level of each student across the content and language domains. They identify which students are ready or have begun already to move on to high school curriculum, which students are really close to mastering the eighth-grade academic levels, and which students are still in need of help and supports to develop proficiency to meet expectations for the ninth-grade level. Educators then start to plan strategic intervention groups, taking into consideration student's placement based on proficiency levels in English or math or both. LHS's master schedule takes all of this information into account to prepare supports for ELL students. Educators also prepare for the fact that some students will be able to transition out of the intensive classrooms while others are going to be together most or all of the year. Some of this depends on students' characteristics and dispositions, the strength of their life skills, and/or weaknesses in English language as they enter the general education classroom.

**Educator role and capacity:** Educators guide students toward resources and provide direct supports as they develop evidence of mastery and move along their own pathways. Content specialist educators work with English learning facilitators to provide ELL students opportunities within their classes to practice language acquisition skills throughout the day.

## WESTMINSTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

*Location: Westminster, CO*

*Grades Served: PK–12*

**Westminster Public Schools** created competency-based and personalized learning environments that promote biliteracy and content mastery for ELL students. The Westminster district has about 10,000 students of which 18 percent are white, 82 percent are children of color (Hispanic, African-American, and Native American students). Westminster has the second highest percentage of English learners in the state with 45 percent of learners in the English language development program. Besides English, Spanish is the other dominant language with an additional 31 languages represented in the district.<sup>25</sup>

Westminster is an English immersion district with one elementary school offering a transitional Spanish-English bilingual track. Teachers build skills to provide instruction to students as they acquire English and master content standards as part of the constant attention to building their capacity to meet the needs of their learners.

**Redefining success for ELL students:** Westminster schools combine WIDA standards for language acquisition, Colorado proficiency standards, and Common Core into a framework for use by teachers. For example, social studies teachers with 50 percent of the class ELD are using the WIDA standards along with the content standards in planning their units. They build vocabulary support and scaffolding into the instructional materials and assessments.

**Assessments of and for learning:** Assessments at Westminster schools are based on capturing students' strengths and weaknesses as they move toward their learning targets. Students receive multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery on their learning targets.

**Personalized learning approaches:** Westminster schools group students together based on proficiency in each subject and language development levels, and students are expected to know what they need to master to move up a level. Students are expected to be able to read and interpret their learning scores and subject-matter rubrics and determine their learning progressions. Teachers deliver personalized instruction targeted to where students are, rather than to the middle. Teachers are aware of every learner and where they are in their learning. They can group learners as needed so that teachers are not trying to respond to as much variance in the classroom as before.

**Educator role and capacity:** Educators are trained on personalized learning strategies and work together to develop and implement a bilingual curriculum that uses personalized learning approaches for ELL students. ELL educators work with content educators to develop personalized learning plans for ELL students that incorporate content standards and biliteracy development. Students' personalized learning plans are based on their language development levels, content levels, and their learning preferences. Students are provided with voice and choice in co-building their units of study and learning goals, including reaching mastery in content and biliteracy objectives. Students' personalized learning plans and performance data guide how educators provide each student with formative assessments. Educators also receive personalized learning plans through consideration of an educator's strengths and weaknesses. The personalized learning plan will include professional development modules that address, among many competencies, some of the following: developing proficiency scales, instructional progression, student learning progression, developing success criteria, and unit planning. At Westminster Public Schools, educators share their learning with each other and have ongoing conversations about student data. Educators frequently participate in walk-throughs, or class observations, across schools. Best practices and common challenges are highlighted and reflected upon during these professional learning observations.

## CESAR CHAVEZ MULTICULTURAL ACADEMIC CENTER

*Location: Chicago, IL*

*Grades Served: 1–8*

[Cesar Chavez Multicultural Academic Center](#) is located in Chicago, Illinois, with a 99 percent low-income and 95 percent Hispanic student population, and 50 percent are classified as ELL students. Cesar Chavez continuously innovates to create personalized student pathways and multiple assessments to measure student progress and growth.

**Redefining success for ELL students:** Chavez provides personalized learning plans, multi-grade cohorts and extended time for students, and students are able to advance in certain subjects, like math and English, upon demonstrating mastery. Students receive bilingual instruction, self-directed learning time and continuous push-in and pull-out support from ELL educators, as needed. Chavez also allows multi-age groups as fifth- and sixth-graders are grouped together and seventh- and eighth-graders are grouped together. The latter group are also able to dually enroll in upper-grade courses through passing course exit exams.

**Assessments of and for learning:** Student-led conferences determine ELL student progress and areas they could improve on; this information is stored in their personalized learning portfolios and students are expected to use this information to guide next steps in their learning. Students are graded based on performance assessments created by Chavez teachers who share a strong mission and vision in personalizing instructional curriculum for students and tracking student progression.

**Personalized learning approaches:** Personalized learning profiles help create a clear path for individual students and consist of the goals, action steps and competencies to guide students toward their learning goals. At Chavez, educators work with each student to develop a personalized learning plan. Each plan captures students' progress in language and content learning and allows students to know where they are in their learning and where they need to improve. Chavez educators also create playlists for students with real-time feedback, enabling teachers to plan for personalization and for students to become more deeply engaged in their learning since it is catered to their pace and progress.

**Educator role and capacity:** ELL students are guided by content educators and ELL educators trained to provide highly differentiated instruction and supports based on students' personalized learning profiles. From pre-K to third-grade students, Chavez provides bilingual certified teachers who offer native language supports in every classroom. For students in fourth grade on up, each ELA educator is either bilingually certified or will receive help from an ESL teacher to offer native language support to students daily. Educators provide additional language and content push-in and pull-out services in addition to direct whole-group and cooperative-group instruction.

## Looking Ahead: Realizing the Promise of Next Generation Learning Models for ELL Students

The case studies presented in the previous section show how these schools have begun to provide personalized, competency-based education models for ELL students. The field is still a long way from realizing fully developed personalized, competency-based education systems. Some education programs serving primarily ELL students have not adopted flexible pace and progress so students can move on when ready due to policies around grade-level promotion. Other education programs that rely on software too heavily have found that many tools fall short in providing the appropriate scaffolds, instruction, academic vocabulary or content integration ELL students need. Many programs still need to provide significant investment in educator training and preparation in personalizing instruction for ELL students. This section highlights the lessons learned from schools that are implementing next generation learning models for ELL students and recommendations for educators and education leaders interested in designing personalized, competency-based learning in their schools.



## LESSONS LEARNED

The case studies in the previous section have undertaken the examination of new models and redesign efforts to provide personalized learning environments. These schools have made changes in focusing on school climate and culture, redefining learning goals for their ELL students, updating their professional development needs, and addressing system- and school-level barriers to implementation. The following are key lessons learned that these case studies demonstrate.

**Create a culture and climate dedicated to continuous improvement:** Transitioning to a competency-based education system takes years, and education programs are involved in continuously improving the design and implementation of the system. In addition, many education programs are relatively new to incorporating the specific needs of ELL students in a personalized, competency-based system. Education programs need to acquire feedback from educators, students and parents on what works and cultivate a culture of growth mindset to improve on designing services that work for ELL students.

For example, Cesar Chavez has modified its school design over the past decade to better serve its students. Chavez began with providing extended after-school tutoring and discovered that ELL students needed more supports beyond what the school was offering, including scaffolds and explicit academic language instruction. From starting with a blended learning program to increasing personalized learning approaches to eventually moving to competency-based progressions, Chavez has been working on designing a more flexible, student-centered learning model to meet the needs of ELL students.

International Schools began with 30 educators working together to design learning strategies for ELL students. They collaborated to create a new school model that specializes in meeting the specific learning needs of ELL students and defined the skills and knowledge ELL students should have at each stage of their learning to reach success. Each International School today is designed in cooperation with district leaders, community members and educators.

**Examine, update and build educator capacity and professional development needs:** Teaching in a personalized, student-centered learning system with effective pedagogical approaches for ELL students requires the development of new skills among teachers and school leaders. Beginning with teaching as inquiry, focusing on research and evidence-based practices, and having a collaborative community of practice sharing strategies and methods across the school are important ways to build educator capacity and provide embedded opportunities for professional development.

For example, International Schools has monthly meetings where teachers from different campuses watch their peers in practice, provide feedback and discuss ways the school and staff can improve. They also have weekly conferences on ELL student progress and what interventions or acceleration strategies should be

employed to support these students. Additionally, International Schools holds professional development meetings weekly during which educators receive personalized and targeted feedback and support from instructional coaches.

Project Exc-EL schools also focus heavily on building educator capacity. The DLLP was created as a tool for educators to be able to determine language learning progressions for ELL students. Educators meet weekly to discuss student work together to further clarify and refine the DLLP prompts and rubrics and what ELL students should know and be able to do at each stage of their language and academic learning. Project Exc-EL schools also take part in cross-campus tours monthly to observe educators providing instruction to ELL students and provide feedback on strategies to improve.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Personalized, competency-based education can meet the needs of ELL students and provide an ideal learning environment that embraces the diversity of backgrounds and prior learning experiences of these students. Educational programs should consider incorporating the following recommendations to design a personalized, competency-based education system that can move ELL students to success.

**Comprehensive definition of success for ELL students:** Education programs should consider broadening their scope beyond the narrow goal of rapidly transitioning ELL students toward reclassification as English proficient. Education programs should consider putting greater emphasis on engaging communities in the conversations around what is necessary for redefining student success to include academic competencies, social-emotional competencies, skills and dispositions with a holistic focus for the whole child, a well-rounded education and the integration of language, literacy and academic content for ELL students.

**Assessments of and for learning for ELL students:** Programs can integrate and align language and academic standards to assessments and provide ongoing formative assessments. The goals of assessments in a competency-based education system should be to inform student learning and next steps for students and educators. Students are provided with multiple opportunities and pathways to demonstrate learning. This could include but is not limited to performance assessments, scaffolded bilingual expressions and explanations, using keywords, drawing and collaborative projects. Education programs need to ensure that multiple pathways don't mean holding ELL students to different standards or lower expectations. To protect rigor and ensure quality, all students should be held to the same high, world-class expectations. To do performance assessments well requires significant investments in building educator capacity to judge proficiency reliably and grade student work with common rubrics. Data from assessments offers transparency for where a student is along their learning trajectory. Data-driven practice enables purposeful, meaningful and evidence-based interventions to ensure our students are moving toward reaching student learning goals and targets on time and on pace.

**Personalized approaches focus on educating the whole child:** Personalized learning approaches in programs can provide differentiated pathways for ELL students to access opportunities and advance based on their own real-time needs and goals. The following are examples of personalized approaches and strategies that programs, educators and education leaders can consider when teaching and working with ELL students:

- » **Provide assessments in students' primary language and English:** Assessments in primary and English languages can help determine what ELL students know and can do.
- » **Provide differentiated instructional strategies to access language:** This could include instructional strategies, such as using prompts in students' primary language and English, previewing vocabulary and explicitly teaching academic language.
- » **Provide targeted supports and feedback based on students' strengths and areas for growth:** Programs can create strategic cooperative groupings based on students' learning levels in language and content and provide personalized individual feedback on students' learning objectives.
- » **Meet learners where they are:** Education programs and educators can use assessments to determine students' proficiency levels in language and academic content areas and then develop personalized learning plans and instructional strategies and supports and map students' learning goals as well as use data to monitor student growth. Meeting students where they are means educators can use learning progressions to identify where ELL students are in the language development level and content level within their learning, are clear about the learning targets, and are able to design or chart each student's unique developmental path toward college and career readiness. This includes providing flexible pacing for students to accelerate or receive additional supports as needed. Outside of academic supports, programs meeting students where they are may include providing wraparound services for students and parents.
- » **Maximize learning through personalized learning tools:** One of the greatest challenges for any school is addressing the diverse needs of students who enter with a range of skills, with some students having significant learning gaps. When coupled with instructional supports from educators, adaptive technologies can add capacity to respond to students' needs and target specific learning gaps. Software such as [Lexia Learning](#) and [Ellevation](#) provide tools teachers need for personalizing approaches with differentiated instruction, interventions, and formative assessments specifically for ELL students. For example, Lexia Learning provides both language development and literacy content for ELL students, ranging from phonological awareness to challenging narrative texts. The texts and assignments are scaffolded based on students' language development levels, age, and grade levels. When students are struggling on specific concepts, educators are notified with information on each student's trends and provided with supplementary material for interventions. And when students are demonstrating mastery on their language development and literacy exercises, they are able to accelerate to deeper, more challenging material. Ellevation also differentiates instruction for diverse student groups and aligns individualized learning plans to language proficiency and academic content

standards. Additionally, educators can use tools such as Ellevation to analyze ELP assessments, provide rapid feedback to students, and help students set and track learning goals. Adaptive technologies combined with competency-based progressions prove fundamental to personalizing education for all students and meeting ELL students' unique needs.

- » **Provide additional supports, as needed:** Education programs need to offer supports for the whole child, including explicitly teaching habits and mindsets and social-emotional learning. Education programs can also provide extending learning opportunities beyond the program to include enrichment activities and experiential learning activities.

**Building educator role and capacity:** For next generation learning models, it is essential to invest in the capacity of educators with the skills and competencies needed to teach in competency-based education and personalized learning environments.

- » **Instruction:** Education programs can provide tools and strategies for educators to support ELL students access English and increase literacy. For example, Dynamic Language Learning Progressions and other language and learning progression tools and rubrics can help educators learn how to respond to student responses and determine what specific language or content learning objective students may be struggling with.
- » **Attitudes and beliefs:** Language is a major barrier for ELL students in terms of being able to express themselves as individuals and learners. ELL students can be overlooked in their ability to answer a question or display their knowledge in the language and manner that may be expected by educators. Educators can support ELL students by encouraging these students and being sensitive to their struggles of learning a new language. Educators need to believe that all students can learn and succeed to support these students toward mastery of their learning goals and objectives. Educators must practice culturally responsive teaching and view ELL students' bilingualism as an asset in learning.
- » **Collaboration between general-subject educators and ELL educators:** By using tools and strategies to help ELL students access the content in the general curriculum, all educators in a school play an important role in continuing language access and acquisition and increasing literacy for ELL students while simultaneously learning academic content. Educators must work with ELL specialists to create appropriate scaffolds and assessments to best serve the learning needs of ELL students.

***Educators need to believe that all students can learn and succeed to support these students toward mastery of their learning goals and objectives. Educators must practice culturally responsive teaching and view ELL students' bilingualism as an asset in learning.***

## CONCLUSION

Across the U.S., schools and programs are building capacity and innovating by designing new instructional models to best meet the learning needs of ELL students. To accomplish this, there needs to be a shift away from a traditional, one-size-fits-all model of education based on seat time toward student-centered next generation learning models in schools and programs that are focused on learning with personalized, competency-based models. A key shift for schools to make is working together across the curriculum and educators to maximize learning opportunities for ELL students. English language acquisition should be a coherent part of ELL students' learning and integrated into academic content courses. This requires a much larger shift in thinking than simply teaching English vocabulary in a math or science course. Personalized, competency-based education is about teaching the whole child, from academic learning to culturally responsive teaching, to developing student skills and dispositions necessary for success in school, postsecondary education, the workplace and civic life.

Increasingly, educators and education programs are embracing a shift away from seat time toward a focus on student learning and the necessity to meet kids where they are with targeted supports. Schools and programs should be intentional about understanding the student population they serve, with particular focus on the diverse backgrounds, cultures, prior learning experiences and learning needs of ELL students. They must refine student success and personalize learning environments with and for ELL students. Next generation learning models start with the assumption that every student can learn at high levels and focus the delivery model centered on student learning goals and outcomes. For our ELL students, next generation learning models can empower and transform learning.

## Appendix

### RESOURCES

#### Competency-based Education

- » [What is Competency Education?](#) *CompetencyWorks*.
- » [Reaching the Tipping Point: Insights on Advancing Competency Education in New England.](#) *CompetencyWorks*.
- » [Implementing Competency Education in K-12 Systems: Insights from Local Leaders.](#) *CompetencyWorks*.
- » [Maximizing Competency Education and Blended Learning: Insights from Experts.](#) *CompetencyWorks*.

#### Culturally Responsive Teaching

- » [Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice.](#) Teachers College Press, 2010.
- » [Culturally Responsive Instruction](#) (for English Language Learners). Colorin Colorado.

#### ELL Learning

- » [Educating English Language Learners: Implementing Instructional Practices.](#) National Council of La Raza and the Education Alliance at Brown University, 2015.
- » [English Language Learners Alliance.](#) Regional Educational Laboratory Northeast & Islands at Education Development Center.
- » [The Implications of Deeper Learning for Adolescent Immigrants and English Language Learners.](#) Jobs for the Future, 2015.
- » [Meeting Students Where They Are: Academic Domains \(Part 2\).](#) *CompetencyWorks*, 2016.
- » [Understanding Language: Language, Literacy, and Learning in the Content Areas.](#) Stanford Graduate School of Education.
- » [2012 Amplification of The English Language Development Standards: Kindergarten- Grade 12.](#) WIDA Consortium. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2012.

#### Learning Progressions

- » [The role of learning progressions in competency-based pathways.](#) Achieve, 2015.
- » [Dynamic Language Learning Progressions.](#) UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies. CRESST - National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, & Student Testing, UCLA ASSETS Consortium, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.
- » [Developing & Using Learning Progressions as a Schema for Measuring Progress.](#) National Center for Assessment, 2008.



## Personalized Learning

- » [Mean What You Say: Defining and Integrating Personalized, Blended, and Competency Education](#). iNACOL, 2013.
- » [Next-Gen Personalized Learning for ELL Students](#). Getting Smart, 2016.
- » [What's Possible with Personalized Learning? An Overview of Personalized Learning for Schools, Families & Communities](#). iNACOL and Getting Smart, 2017.

## GLOSSARY

**Assessment Literacy:** Assessment literacy is the collection of knowledge and skills associated with appropriate assessment design, implementation, interpretation, and, most importantly, use. A critical aspect of assessment literacy is that educators and leaders know and to create and/or select a variety of assessments to serve different purposes such as improving learning and teaching, grading, program evaluation, and accountability. However, the most important component of assessment literacy is the degree to which educators and others are able to appropriately interpret the data coming from assessments and then take defensible instructional or other actions.

**Calibration:** Calibration is a process of adjusting results based on a comparison with a known standard or “calibration weight” in order to allow defensible comparisons of student assessment results, for example, across different entities (e.g., schools, districts, states). In order to define a calibration weight, we need to have something in common, either the same students taking different assessments or different students taking the same assessments. The latter is generally more practical so common performance tasks have been administered to students in different schools and districts as performance assessments to serve as a “calibration weight” to evaluate the extent to which teachers in different locales evaluate the quality of student work similarly.

**Competency-based Education:** Also known as mastery-based, proficiency-based or performance-based, is a school- or district-wide structure that replaces the traditional structure to create a system that is designed for students to be successful (as compared to sorted) and leads to continuous improvement. In 2011, 100 innovators in competency education came together for the first time. At that meeting, participants fine-tuned a working definition of high-quality competency education, which includes five elements:

- » Students advance upon demonstrated mastery.
- » Competencies include explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower students.
- » Assessment is meaningful and a positive learning experience for students.
- » Students receive timely, differentiated support based on their individual learning needs.
- » Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include application and creation of knowledge, along with the development of important skills and dispositions.

**Culturally Responsive Teaching:** First coined by [Gloria Ladson-Billing in 1944](#), culturally responsive teaching is the pedagogical practice of recognizing, exploring and responding to students' cultural contexts, references, and experiences. Cultural responsiveness builds upon eight principles:

1. Communication of High Expectations
2. Active Teaching Methods
3. Practitioner as Facilitator
4. Inclusion of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Student
5. Cultural Sensitivity
6. Reshaping the Curriculum or Delivery of Services
7. Student-Controlled Discourse
8. Small-Group Instruction

The New York City Mastery Collaborative highlights that a competency-based approach can promote cultural responsiveness in the following ways:

- » **Transparency:** Path to success is clear and learning outcomes are relevant to students' lives and interests. Shared criteria reduce opportunity for implicit bias.
- » **Facilitation shifts:** Refocus the roles of students and teachers to include flexible pacing and inquiry-based, collaborative approach to learning. Students drive their own learning, and teachers coach them.
- » **Positive learning identity:** Growth mindset and active learning build agency and affirm students' identities as learners (academics, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc.).

**Language Proficiency:** Refers to mastery of specified levels of the four domains of language development: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

**Learning Progression:** Learning progressions are research-based approaches and map how students learn key concepts and skills as described in Achieve's briefing [The Role of Learning Progressions in Competency-Based Pathways](#).

**Personalized Approach to Learning or Personalized Learning:** iNACOL defines personalized learning as "tailoring learning for each student's strengths, needs and interests – including enabling student voice and choice in what, how, when and where they learn – to provide flexibility and supports to ensure mastery of the highest standards possible." Personalized learning takes into account students' differing zones of proximal development with regard to academic and cognitive skills, as well as within the physical, emotional, metacognitive and other domains.

**Social and Emotional Learning:** According to CASEL, “social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.” They focus on the development of five competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

### Common Types of Instruction for ELL Students (Colorin Colorado):

- » **Push-In/Pull-Out Tutoring:** ELL students attend academic content courses in English while being provided separate instructional support in their primary language either by an ELL specialist during the class or in a separate session outside of class. This method is most often used for ELL students with at least some proficiency in the English language.
- » **Scaffolding:** Instruction or support mechanisms given in such a way that they enable students to safely take risks, handle tasks involving complex language, and reach for higher goals with the help of teachers and other peers. Scaffolds are temporary because as the teacher observes that students are capable of handling more on their own, the teacher gradually hands over responsibility to them.
- » **Sheltered English Instruction:** ELL students, particularly those with low English proficiency, are taught in a stand-alone classroom. The teacher may focus considerable time on direct language instruction as well as academic content. Within a classroom, students are often grouped by their English proficiency so that lessons can be tailored for different levels.
- » **Bilingual Instruction:** Students receive ongoing language and academic content instruction in both their primary language and English.
- » **Dual Language Instruction:** Dual language immersion programs include both native and non-native English speakers. These often begin with most of the content taught in the target, or non-English, language. Gradually, the time spent teaching in both languages is evenly split, with the goal of making all students exit the program proficient in both languages.

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