

Pathway to Academic Success Project

Intervention Brief | English Learners Topic Area

WHAT WORKS
CLEARINGHOUSE™

November 2021

WWC 2022-004
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A Publication of the National Center for Education Evaluation at IES

English learners (ELs) bring valuable cultural and linguistic knowledge and experiences with them to school. Yet these students face the unique challenge of simultaneously learning English and other academic content, which can lead to lower scores in reading and writing in English compared to their non-EL peers. Despite the additional challenges faced by ELs, teachers receive little training in how to effectively teach this population of students.

The *Pathway to Academic Success Project* trains teachers to improve the reading and writing abilities of ELs who have an intermediate level of English proficiency by incorporating cognitive strategies into reading and writing instruction. The cognitive strategies include goal setting, tapping prior

knowledge, asking questions, making predictions, articulating and revising understanding of text, and evaluating writing.

This What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) intervention report, part of the WWC's English Learners topic area, explores the effects of the *Pathway to Academic Success Project* on writing quality, writing conventions, and literacy achievement for ELs. The WWC identified five studies of the *Pathway to Academic Success Project*. Three of these studies meet WWC standards. The evidence presented in this report is from these three studies on ELs—with a sample in which 94% of students are Hispanic—in grades 6 to 12 in three urban and three suburban school districts.

What Happens When English Learners Participate in the *Pathway to Academic Success Project*?

The evidence indicates that implementing the *Pathway to Academic Success Project* has potentially positive effects on writing quality, writing conventions, and literacy achievement, compared with business-as-usual professional development and English language arts instruction.

Findings on the *Pathway to Academic Success Project* from three studies that meet WWC standards are shown in Table 1. The table reports an effectiveness rating, an improvement index, and the number of studies and students that contributed to the findings. The effectiveness rating is based on the quality of the designs used in studies, whether the findings are favorable or unfavorable for the intervention, and the number of studies that tested the intervention. See Box 1 for more information on interpreting effectiveness ratings.

In order to help readers judge the practical importance of an intervention's effect, the WWC translates findings across studies into an "improvement index" by averaging findings that meet WWC standards within the same outcome domain. The improvement index can be interpreted as the expected change in percentile rank for an average comparison group student if that student had received the intervention. For example, an improvement index of +16 means that the expected percentile rank of the average comparison group student would increase by 16 points if the student received instruction from a *Pathway to Academic Success Project* teacher instead of the instruction provided to the comparison group. A positive improvement index does not necessarily mean the estimated effect is statistically significant.

Table 1. Summary of findings on the *Pathway to Academic Success Project* from studies that meet WWC standards

Outcome domain	Effectiveness rating	Study findings	Evidence meeting WWC standards (version 4.0)	
		Improvement index (percentile points)	Number of studies	Number of students
Writing quality	Potentially positive effects	+16	2	444
Writing conventions	Potentially positive effects	+3	1	2,721
Literacy achievement	Potentially positive effects	+3	1	2,726

Note: The effects of the *Pathway to Academic Success Project* are not known for other outcomes within the English Learners topic area, including alphabets, reading fluency, reading comprehension, writing productivity, English language proficiency, mathematics achievement, science achievement, and social studies achievement.

BOX 1. HOW THE WWC REVIEWS AND DESCRIBES EVIDENCE

The WWC evaluates evidence based on the quality and results of reviewed studies. The criteria the WWC uses for evaluating evidence are defined in the [Procedures and Standards Handbooks](#) and the [Review Protocols](#). The studies summarized in this report were reviewed under WWC Standards (version 4.0) and the English Learners topic area protocol (version 4.0).

To determine the effectiveness rating, the WWC considers what methods each study used, the direction of the effects, and the number of studies that tested the intervention. The higher the effectiveness rating, the more certain the WWC is about the reported results and about what will happen if the same intervention is implemented again. The following key explains the relationship between effectiveness ratings and the statements used in this report:

Effectiveness Rating	Rating interpretation	Description of the evidence
Positive (or negative) effects	The intervention is likely to change an outcome	Strong evidence of a positive (or negative) effect, with no overriding contrary evidence
Potentially positive (or negative) effects	The intervention may change an outcome	Evidence of a positive (or negative) effect, with no overriding contrary evidence
No discernible effects	The intervention may result in little to no change in an outcome	No affirmative evidence of effects
Mixed effects	The intervention has inconsistent effects on an outcome	Evidence includes studies in at least two of these categories: studies with positive effects, studies with negative effects, or more studies with indeterminate effects than with positive or negative effects

How Is the *Pathway to Academic Success Project* Implemented?

The following section provides details of how districts and schools can implement the *Pathway to Academic Success Project* intervention. This information can help educators identify the requirements for implementing the intervention and determine whether implementation would be feasible in their districts or schools. Information presented in this section comes from the studies that meet WWC standards (Kim et al., 2011; Olson et al., 2016, 2020) and from correspondence with the intervention developer.

- **Goal:** The *Pathway to Academic Success Project* trains teachers to improve the reading and writing abilities of ELs who have at least an intermediate level of English proficiency by incorporating cognitive strategies into reading and writing instruction.
- **Target population:** The *Pathway to Academic Success Project* is designed for grades 6 to 12 general education English language arts (ELA) teachers who have ELs in their classrooms. The target student population is ELs in general education classrooms who have an intermediate level of English proficiency. Students with an intermediate level of English proficiency are proficient in colloquial English, but are still building skills in academic language, reading, and writing in English.
- **Method of delivery:** Teachers receive the *Pathway to Academic Success Project* training through professional development and coaching offered by experienced *Pathway to Academic Success Project* teachers. Teachers then implement the strategies during their regular ELA class time.
- **Frequency and duration of service:** Teachers participate in 46 hours of professional development per year, over the course of 2 years. This training includes five or six full-day meetings and five after-school meetings throughout each school year. Teachers are also encouraged to meet in professional learning communities to discuss implementation for at least 1 hour each week. The instructional time teachers spend working with students on the *Pathway to Academic Success Project* strategies varies from teacher to teacher. However, most teachers report spending at least 60 hours of their class time using *Pathway to Academic Success Project* strategies with students during each school year.
- **Intervention components:** The key components of the *Pathway to Academic Success Project*, which are teacher professional development, coaching, and instructional materials and supplies, are described in Table 2.

Comparison condition: In the three studies that contribute to this intervention report, students in the comparison group were taught by teachers who did not receive *Pathway to Academic Success Project* training. Teachers received the regular professional development offered by their schools or school districts.

Table 2. Components of the *Pathway to Academic Success Project*

Key component	Description
Teacher professional development	The <i>Pathway to Academic Success Project</i> includes 2 years of professional development sessions focused on training in literary response and analysis, comprehension and analysis of informational nonfiction texts, synthesis of multiple texts, and development of clear, coherent, focused essays. Teachers are trained to use a cognitive strategies toolkit that includes reading and writing strategies such as setting goals, tapping prior knowledge, asking questions, making predictions, interpreting texts, articulating and revising understanding of text, and evaluating and revising their writing. Teachers are also provided a curricular approach and instructional strategies for demonstrating the cognitive strategies in the toolkit to students, including direct instruction, modeling, and guided practice. Teachers are also trained on how to use a student writing assessment to determine individual student needs and strengths and then provide tailored writing instruction. Districts may also opt to have the <i>Pathway to Academic Success Project</i> identify a guest speaker to present to teachers during the professional development sessions.
Coaching	Teachers receive ongoing support on how to integrate cognitive strategies into their schools' English language arts (ELA) curriculum from coaches who are typically experienced <i>Pathway to Academic Success Project</i> teachers. Coaches may be teachers selected by district leadership or retired National Writing Project teachers who are trained to coach by the <i>Pathway to Academic Success Project</i> . Coaches conduct informal visits to participating classrooms and provide written feedback to teachers. They also attend the professional development with teachers and assist teachers in implementing the <i>Pathway to Academic Success Project</i> cognitive strategies approach into their standard ELA curricula. District literacy specialists also provide support by serving as liaisons between <i>Pathway to Academic Success Project</i> staff and district and school staff.
Instructional materials and supplies	Throughout the school year, teachers receive classroom materials that they can use to enhance their instruction of cognitive strategies, such as wall posters with visuals representing cognitive strategies, preprinted class sets of readings and handouts, and bookmarks and lists of cognitive sentence starters for students. Teachers also receive materials for helping students apply cognitive strategies to revise their pretest writing assessment into a finished essay, as well as supplies for students to implement the strategies such as highlighters and binders. Finally, teachers receive model lessons to use in their classrooms. These model lessons are based on texts that are culturally relevant to students and that teachers have used during professional development.

What Does the *Pathway to Academic Success Project* Cost?

This preliminary list of costs is not designed to be exhaustive; rather, it provides educators an overview of the major resources needed to implement the *Pathway to Academic Success Project*. The program costs described in Table 3 reflect the costs for an individual school district to participate in the *Pathway to Academic Success Project* and are based on information available as of June 2021. The developer reported that the typical cost including both required and optional cost ingredients in Table 3 is \$65 per

student directly served by the *Pathway to Academic Success Project*, assuming 175 students per teacher in a district with 8 schools and 8 teachers participating in each school. The total cost per district in this scenario is \$728,000 for both years. Without the optional costs, the per-student cost is \$33.38 and cost per district in this scenario is \$373,800 for both years. The cost will vary based on the number of teachers and students served and whether the district includes the optional elements described in Table 3.

Table 3. Cost ingredients for *Pathway to Academic Success Project*

Cost ingredients	Description	Source of funding
Personnel	Teachers receive in-person training during 10 full-day meetings and 10 after-school meetings over the course of 2 school years. A full-day meeting costs \$4,500 and an after-school meeting costs \$1,500. The cost includes the trainer, and the trainer is typically a <i>Pathway to Academic Success Project</i> staff member. However, the intervention developer may provide training to district staff so they can independently deliver <i>Pathway to Academic Success Project</i> training. The cost of the training is the same but allows the district to deliver its own training in the future. <i>Pathway to Academic Success Project</i> coaches receive a \$1,500 stipend each year and usually serve three to six teachers. District literacy specialists receive a \$2,500 stipend each year. Districts may also opt to provide teachers a stipend for participation (\$1,000 per teacher per year). Guest speakers at trainings are optional and cost \$500 to \$2,000, depending on the speaker. Districts may also pay for optional essay readers to read and score student essays. Essay readers cost \$200 per class section; costs will vary depending on the number of class periods and whether district staff or <i>Pathway to Academic Success Project</i> staff read the essays.	School districts or schools pay for personnel costs as part of <i>Pathway to Academic Success Project</i> .
Facilities	Standard meeting facilities are included in the meeting costs, and schools and districts may reduce the cost of facilities by providing their own or using donated facilities.	School districts or schools pay for facility costs as part of <i>Pathway to Academic Success Project</i> or can provide their own or use donated facilities for training.

Cost ingredients	Description	Source of funding
Equipment and materials	<i>Pathway to Academic Success Project</i> materials, which are provided in the first year, typically cost \$2,000 per teacher when purchased in bulk for at least 60 teachers. The materials include model lessons and classroom materials to support instruction, as well as supplies such as bookmarks, highlighters, and binders. Districts may opt to provide participating teachers with a \$1,500 stipend across both school years to purchase a classroom library to support <i>Pathway to Academic Success Project</i> instruction. General office supplies and copying cost an additional \$6,400 per year. <i>Pathway to Academic Success Project</i> staff also customize materials for the after-school meetings to address a participating district's specific needs; for example, designing a session on adapting the cognitive strategies approach for the district's adopted textbook. Customizing the after-school meeting materials costs an additional \$5,000 per year (\$1,000 per meeting).	School districts or schools pay for equipment and materials as part of <i>Pathway to Academic Success Project</i> .

For More Information:

About the *Pathway to Academic Success Project*
 University of California, Irvine Education Building,
 401 East Peltason, Suite 3100, Irvine, CA 92697
 Attn: Dr. Carol Booth Olson
 Email: cbolson@uci.edu
 Web: <http://www.ucipathwayproject.com>
 Phone: (949) 824-7842 (x5922)

About the cost of the intervention
 The developer provided information about the *Pathway to Academic Success Project* costs.

About the studies that meet WWC standards

Kim, J. S., Olson, C. B., Scarcella, R., Kramer, J., Pearson, M., van Dyk, D., Collins, P., & Land, R. E. (2011). A randomized experiment of a cognitive strategies approach to text-based analytical writing for mainstreamed Latino English language learners in grades 6 to 12. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 4(3), 231–362. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ932553>

Olson, C. B., Matuchniak, T., Chung, H. Q., Stumpf, R., & Farkas, G. (2016). Reducing achievement gaps in academic writing for Latinos and English learners in grades 7–12. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 109(1), 1–21. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1125530>

Olson, C. B., Woodworth, K., Arshan, N., Black, R., Chung, H. Q., D'Aoust, C., Dewar, T., Friedrich, L., Godfrey, L., Land, R., Matuchniak, T., Scarcella, R., & Stowell, L. (2020). The Pathway to Academic Success: Scaling up a text-based analytical writing intervention for Latinos and English Learners in secondary school. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 122(4) 701–717. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1249837>

In What Context Was *Pathway to Academic Success Project* Studied?

The following section provides information on the setting of the three studies of the *Pathway to Academic Success Project* that meet WWC standards, and a description of the participants in the research.

This information can help educators understand the context in which the studies of the *Pathway to Academic Success Project* were conducted and determine whether the program might be suitable for their setting.

WHERE THE STUDY WAS CONDUCTED



3 studies, 3,170 students in 71 middle and high schools in 6 districts in **California**

Urban and suburban districts

Race



Ethnicity



English Learner
Status: 97%

Gender
51% Female 49% Male

Free & Reduced-Price
Lunch: 80%

Grades

PK

K

1

2

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PS



LEARN MORE



Read more about the *Pathway to Academic Success Project* intervention and the studies that are summarized in this brief in the [Intervention Report](#).