



Quick Reference Guide: School Level Asset-Based Teaching and Learning

Train and Support Educators

School leaders support and train educators to implement instruction that encourages students to share their cultures, families, and experiences in ways that promotes student success with rigorous content.

Educator attitudes towards ELs' linguistic and cultural backgrounds influence their expectations of student achievement. EL success with rigorous content requires educators who value and capitalize on the assets they bring to learning: their language, culture, experiences, backgrounds, knowledge, skills, etc. Leveraging these assets supports responsive and differentiated instruction and can lead to increased student agency, understanding of multiple perspectives, advocacy skills, and taking responsibility for their own achievement. Educators can develop skills for asset-based teaching approaches that promote learning of rigorous content through effective professional learning opportunities. [Professional learning that results in changes to educators' instructional practices](#) is sustained and intensive, collaborative and structured, aligned with educators' roles and school initiatives, and connected to opportunities to see practices modeled, apply what is learned, and receive feedback on implementation.

Sample Educator Training Topics to Support Asset-Based Teaching of ELs

- Incorporating cultural, linguistic, and prior experiences and learning into lesson plans
- Culturally responsive pedagogy
- Differentiating instruction for ELs based on individual characteristics (like language proficiency level) without decreasing rigor
- Identifying and confronting personal biases and deficit-based views
- Developing and implementing culturally responsive strategies for social and emotional development
- Developing trusting relationships with families to learn about students' backgrounds and support learning collaboratively
- Bridging family and school cultures
- Incorporating community resources and practices in classroom instruction and school programs

Implement Programs and Activities that Support Bilingualism and Biliteracy

Supporting Bilingual Programs



School leaders implement programs and activities that promote bilingualism and biliteracy (e.g., State Seal of Biliteracy, dual language/two-way immersion programs, world language classes).

Asset-based views of EL instruction see language development as a way to increase the overall linguistic abilities students already have rather than just help them learn English (Bunch, 2013). Bilingual programs, such as [two-way immersion](#), build on what students (ELs and non-ELs) already know and do in their first language to develop proficiency in English and succeed academically. They help maintain continuity in ELs' cognitive and socioemotional development, provide opportunity for transferring knowledge and skills from one language to

another, and support all students' abilities to become global citizens by developing cross-cultural competence. School leaders can support EL success by establishing effective bilingual programs and activities and allocating appropriate resources to ensure they are successful.

Provide Safe Learning Environments Where ELs Contribute

School leaders provide a safe learning environment where ELs are empowered to have a voice, be active learners, and contribute to the school community.

Valuing ELs and capitalizing on the assets they bring for learning requires knowing students and their families and involving them in shaping a safe and welcoming learning environment. Learning environments that support EL student success affirm their identities, incorporate their previous experiences and background into learning, and give them opportunities to apply their learning in real life situations School leaders can help educators learn about ELs by

- providing opportunities to interview families during new student intake and registration
- providing time for educators to continue gathering information through the school year
- supporting home visits, educator and parent conferences, and structured activities for families to share about their backgrounds and experiences in navigating multiple cultures
- developing a safe, effective learning environment for ELs

School leaders can support EL student voice and contribution by asking for their input in program and school climate needs-assessment and [surveys](#), giving ELs access to leadership and decision-making spaces like school committee and other forums, and involving ELs in designing and implementing school improvement strategies. Leaders can also support EL student contribution by providing time and resources for ELs to collaborate in carrying out their suggestions alongside school staff.

Actions-at-a-Glance: Asset-based Instruction

Asset-based instruction: What can educators at the school level do?

- Provide opportunities to interview families during new student intake and registration
- Set aside time for educators to learn about ELs and their families through home visits, parent-teacher conferences and structured activities where families share about their background and experiences
- Gather EL student input through program and school climate needs-assessment and surveys
- Give ELs access to leadership and decision-making spaces like school committee and other forums
- Include ELs in designing and implementing school improvement strategies
- Provide time and resources for ELs to collaborate in carrying out their suggestions for improvement
- Provide opportunities for [instructional coaching focused on culturally sustaining practices for ELs](#)
- Establish structures for educators to engage in professional learning in their own classroom (research projects, peer observations, etc.)

Planning Resources

DESE Practical Tools and Resources

[Cultural Proficiency: A Strategy to Address Equity Gaps in Students' Achievement and Learning Experiences](#)

provides examples of cultural proficiency from districts in Massachusetts and links to resources to help educators plan culturally responsive instruction.

[ESL Model Curriculum Units](#) provide examples of culturally responsive, asset-based curriculum and instruction for ELs. The webpage also provides tools and resources for developing curriculum that promotes language learning and academic achievement simultaneously, like the Collaboration Tool and the Interactive Collaboration Tool Guide.

[Educator Evaluation and Professional Development Resource Guide](#) provides information about leveraging educator evaluation and professional learning to improve instruction.

[Extending the Learning Opportunities](#) provides information about professional learning to support the Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners (RETELL) initiative, including instructional coaching (Collaborating through Coaching: Six Standards of Effective Pedagogy in SEI Literacy and Mathematics Instruction).

[Views of Climate and Learning \(VOCAL\) Survey Project](#) is an annual DESE survey designed to gather student input on school climate. Although the survey is only available in English, school leaders can use it as a foundation for developing tailored survey instruments for gathering EL student input that are responsive to varying levels of English language proficiency and/or ELs native languages.

DESE Guidance

[Guidance for Defining and Implementing Two Way Immersion Programs](#) provides information on Two-Way Immersion programs, including guidance on models and instructional practices and practical resources (see p. 8-13 and Appendix B).

[Massachusetts State Seal of Biliteracy](#) provides information about how to develop and implement bilingual programs based on the Language Opportunity for Our Kids (LOOK) Act.

[Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation: Classroom Teacher Rubric](#) Standards 2B and 2D (p. 6-8) speak to creating culturally responsive and safe instruction and to classroom environment and can be used to guide educator self-reflection on how they structure learning environments and instruction to improve learning.

[Massachusetts Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education \(SLIFE\) Definition and Guidance](#) provides information about the importance of asset-based approaches when teaching SLIFE (see Guiding Principles on p. 8).

[Next Generation ESL Project: Curriculum Resource Guide](#) provides recommendations from an asset-based perspective. It discusses considerations for EL instruction, including developing culturally responsive curriculum (Theory of Action on p. 11-12 and Attending to the Role of Critical Stance and Social Justice in ESL Curriculum Development on p. 158 - 161). It also provides guidelines and resources for effective professional learning (p. 170 – 175).

Federal Resources

[Newcomer Tool Kit](#) provides information about programming for newcomers. Chapter 3: High-Quality Instruction for Newcomer Students includes guidelines for teaching newcomers such as principles for teaching ELs, common misconceptions about teaching ELs, and a sample list of academic programs for newcomers.

[Non-Regulatory Guidance: English Learners and Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act \(ESEA\), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#) provides information about the use of Title III funds, including information about effective professional development to support EL teaching and learning (p. 22-26).

Other Featured Resources

[Key Principles for ELL Instruction](#) outlines six key principles to support ELLs in meeting the rigorous, grade level academic standards that are applicable to any type of instruction regardless of grade, proficiency level, or program type. Principle number 2 addresses asset-based approaches.

Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of Knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, 31(2). 132–141. Defines funds of knowledge or assets ELs and their families possess that can be leveraged for learning and argues for capitalizing on them as a way to improve the quality of instruction for ELs.

[Schools to Learn From](#) provides information about six high schools with strong college and career outcomes for ELs, including examples of shared values guiding daily actions and decision-making, school design elements, and instructional practices that set up an environment where ELs can thrive (see the Executive Summary, p. 2-5).

[The Importance of Focusing on Students' Assets](#) presents strategies educators and school leaders can use to implement an asset-based approach to teaching and learning for all students as well as specific considerations for ELs.

[The Principles of Strengths-Based Education](#) describes five educational principles for strength or asset-based education.

[Transformative Leadership: An Asset-Based Approach to Leadership for Diverse Schools and Learners](#) presents an asset-based model for school leadership that includes educators and students in decision-making to better navigate cultural differences.

[Using a Strengths-Based Approach with ELs: Supporting Students Living with Trauma, Violence and Chronic Stress](#) explains why asset-based approaches are effective and provides strategies for implementing them with this group of ELs.

WIDA's [Focus Bulletin on SLIFE: Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education, Essential Actions Handbook](#) (see Actions 1 and 3), and [Can-Do Philosophy](#) (see also related [video](#)) provide a framework for asset-based approaches for teaching ELs and ideas for how to implement it with different groups of ELs.