



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

Educators Know Students and Leverage Knowledge to Support Success

District leaders ensure that schools prioritize culturally responsive instruction that encourages students to share their cultures, families, and experiences in ways that promote student success with rigorous content.

The current Massachusetts Model Evaluation System [Educator Effectiveness Rubric](#) highlights the importance of cultural proficiency and high expectations for all students to succeed, including English learners (ELs.) These two criteria in the rubric point to the connection between knowing ELs' assets and strengths and using that knowledge to meet high expectations of grade-level, standards-based instruction. District leaders dedicate professional learning time to set expectations that educators and staff will implement culturally responsive policies and practices. They support administrators, educators and staff with resources so they can establish systems able to acknowledge the diverse backgrounds, identities, strengths, and challenges ELs bring to schooling. This is especially important in districts where school personnel do not share same background and experiences as ELs. Effective district leaders also clarify that simply understanding an EL's background is not enough. Instead, they emphasize and support educators to integrate this knowledge when they build lessons and units, establish procedures, choose instructional strategies, choose materials and go about completing the normal range of administrative and instructional tasks. They discuss how these cultural responsive practices are necessary to help ELs succeed in demonstrating learning and meeting the [rigorous expectations of grade-level standards](#).

Programming to Explore English Learners' Cultures and Promote Bilingualism

District administrators and school committees ensure that all schools cultivate programs and activities that lead to proficiency in English and other languages (e.g., dual language/two-way immersion, language learning support, State Seal of Bilingualism).

District leaders committed to asset-based teaching and learning find ways to leverage linguistic differences to support bilingualism for all students. For example, they explore new program options offered by the [LOOK Act: Transitional Bilingual Education \(TBE\)](#) and [Two-Way Immersion \(TWI\)](#) and develop in-depth knowledge of the benefits of each one. TBE programs offer EL students opportunities to learn content in their home language while developing their proficiency in English. They do not continue developing an ELs' home language proficiency. TWI programs enroll both English speakers and ELs who speak the second "target" language and provide content instruction in both English and the target language. These programs offer native English speakers and ELs the opportunity for bilingual development together. District leaders also become acquainted with LOOK Act opportunities to promote bilingualism such as the [State Seal of Bilingualism](#). This allows students in school districts across the

Commonwealth to earn a recognition of bilingualism on their high school diploma and can be used to promote bilingual programs for both ELs and non-ELs. Building on ELs' linguistic strengths can create strong foundations for world language partnerships for all students and increase numbers of students meeting the [rigorous criteria](#) of the Seal of Bilingualism.

Purpose of the State Seal of Bilingualism

- Encourage students to study and master languages;
- Certify attainment of bilingual skills;
- Recognize the value of language diversity;
- Provide employers with a method of identifying people with language and bilingual skills;
- Provide universities with a method to recognize and give credit to applicants for the attainment of high-level skills in languages;
- Prepare students with skills that will benefit them in the labor market and the global society; and
- Strengthen intergroup communication and honor the multiple cultures and languages in a community."

[Guidance for Implementing the Massachusetts State Seal of Bilingualism](#)

Empowering English Learners to Take Academic Risks

District leaders enact policies that communicate a sense of urgency about empowering ELs to use their voice, be active learners, and contribute to the district community.

District leaders that effectively support EL success set expectations for them to become full participants in academic conversations and leadership opportunities, utilizing their full repertoires of linguistic and cultural knowledge and resources. This includes setting expectations for teachers to deliver instruction that develops the confidence as well as the

academic and linguistic skills to participate in content focused classroom discussions and advocate for themselves in the larger school community. District leaders can support this work by dedicating time for collaboration between ESL and content area teachers to identify shifts to existing lesson structures that increase the opportunity for students talk and think aloud. District leaders can create accountability around implementing instructional changes by collecting evidence of the shift in practice, sharing success of these collaborations, and suggesting additional action where necessary. The Department's [Collaboration Tool](#) is one way to frame these continued conversations. The Department regularly publishes [professional development offerings](#) that expand on effective strategies for EL instruction. Districts can create opportunities outside of the classroom for students to practice these skills. For example, an initiative focused on diversifying recruitment of students for the local Student Advisory Council could intentionally result in representation from a range of languages and cultures. If your district has an [English Language Parent Advisory Council](#) (ELPAC), creating authentic ways for older students to engage with or on the ELPAC could mirror the ways that student representatives participate on Massachusetts School Committees. This could add voices with experience to conversations about improving district English Learner programming. What may be a feather in the cap for both districts and students, district and school based leaders can also create paths to earning the [Seal of Biliteracy](#) for EL students, recognizing the asset of proficiency in a language other than English.

Actions-at-a-Glance: Asset-based Teaching and Learning

Family Engagement: What can educators at the district level do?

- Prioritize asset-based instruction by acknowledging the Culturally Proficient criteria in the Classroom Teacher Rubric for Educator Evaluation
- Consider district participation in the Seal for Biliteracy. Evaluate implementation needs
- Make culturally responsive practices a priority for the District data collection and professional development
- Plan professional learning to include cultural competency and a lens for bilingualism, biculturalism and English learners
- Support teachers to empower ELs with the confidence and skill to use their voice and be active learners
- Intentionally increase opportunities for EL student representation in student government and as student representatives on governing bodies
- Create paths to the Seal of Biliteracy for EL students, celebrating their background and assets
- Build time in the curriculum for students to practice communication skills by getting to know each other and learning appropriate ways to communicate differences of opinions or disagreements
- Build student skills for discussing and debating rigorous academic content

Planning Resources

DESE Practical Tools and Resources

[DESE Next Generation ESL 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).

[Massachusetts Model for Educator Effectiveness: Classroom Teacher Rubric](#) communicates the criteria necessary to be an effective teacher, including criteria specific to the Culturally Proficient Indicator (p. 8)

[Massachusetts Model for Educator Effectiveness: School Level Administrator Rubric](#) communicates the criteria necessary for effective building level school leadership, including Meeting Diverse Needs of Students (p. 2), Social Emotional Well Being (p. 10), and Culturally Proficient Communication, (p. 18).

[Massachusetts Model for Educator Effectiveness: Superintendent and District Level Leader Rubric](#) communicates the criteria necessary for effective district level leadership, including Across Schools Expectations for Shared Responsibility (p. 18) and Culturally Proficient Communication (p. 19).

[SEI Smartcard](#) offers examples of how Asset-Based Teaching and Learning Practices can be embedded into a lesson focused on developing content knowledge and academic language development.

DESE Guidance

[DESE Summary of The Language Opportunities for Our Kids \(LOOK Act\)](#) presents legislation regarding flexibility for language acquisition programs.

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

[Guidance for Implementing the Massachusetts State Seal of Biliteracy](#) explains the Seal of Biliteracy and provides links to information about how to development and implementation of the Seal.

[Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education \(SLIFE\)](#) provides links to resources that help define and guide programming for SLIFE students including 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).

[English Learner Parent Advisory Councils](#) (ELPACs) guides districts and schools in establishing and supporting effective principles for promoting and strengthening school-family partnerships and offers recommendations for developing and supporting successful ELPACs. It starts by explaining which districts are required to create ELPACs (p. 2).

Federal Resources

[Newcomer Tool Kit](#) provides information about programming for newcomers (see p. 62-74).

[Non-Regulatory Guidance: English Learners and Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act \(ESEA\), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#) This federal resources 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

[Boston Public Schools Cultural Proficiency Work](#) provides resources for developing educators' cultural proficiency.

[Mass. Students are increasingly diverse. But their teachers are not](#) Highlights disparities between the racial makeup of teachers and the racial makeup of students in Massachusetts.

[Funds of Knowledge and Home Visit Toolkit](#) provides guidance for an asset-based strategy for engaging families in partnering with schools and school districts.