This document outlines foundational understandings guiding the Next Generation ESL Curriculum & Instructional Support Initiative. They represent research that informed the Next Generation ESL project (2014-2018). This resource can be used by educators at all levels to gain a better understanding of the focus, characteristics, and theories supporting ESL instruction in Massachusetts. Educators at all levels can also use it to reflect on current practices and systems in place:

* At the **classroom level**, educators can use it to reflect on whether current instruction aligns with the definition of ESL and reflects the features of high-quality ESL instruction.
* **School leaders** can use these foundational understandings to gain insights into what ESL instruction should look like in classrooms to ensure that curriculum, instruction, and assessment meet the need of English learners in the school.
* **District leaders** can use this document as they plan or evaluate ways of structuring English Learner Education programs grounded in the state’s definition of ESL, and to ensure programs reflect the features of high-quality ESL curriculum and instruction that maximize English learners’ success.

## Foundational Understanding 1: The *WHAT*– A Definition of English as a Second Language (ESL) Instruction

The Definition of ESL is the starting point on which ESL instruction, curriculum, and delivery approaches are built. It is a cornerstone of the Massachusetts [Vision for English Learner Education](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/), a vital component for supporting English learners’ language development across English Learner Education Programs. Getting a clear understanding of the definition of ESL is important for ensuring high-quality ESL instruction is effective in supporting English learners’ language development and structured in ways that are aligned with Massachusetts guidance no matter how or where it is delivered.

ESL instruction in Massachusetts is defined as follows:

The goal of English as a second language (ESL) instruction in Massachusetts public schools is to advance English Learners’ (ELs) language development towards English language proficiency and promote their academic achievement. English language proficiency includes knowledge and ability to use social and academic language across modes of communication (listening, reading, viewing, writing, speaking, and representing, WIDA 2020). To support this goal, ***ESL instruction provides systematic, explicit, and sustained language instruction, and prepares students for grade level content by focusing on academic language while also attending to social instructional language.*** Effective ESL instruction supports student success in school, including mastering WIDA English Language Development Standards as demonstrated by improvement in ACCESS for ELLs scores, meeting established language proficiency benchmarks, and acceleration of academic achievement. It also supports long-term goals such as college and career readiness. ESL instruction is a required component of all English Learner Education programs in Massachusetts (Sheltered English Immersion, Transitional Bilingual Education, and One- and Two-Way Immersion). In practice this means ESL instruction:

* Is its own subject matter, taught by a licensed ESL teacher
* Follows its own dedicated curriculum that is aligned to the WIDA English Language Development Standards and the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks
* Is language driven and integrated, promoting common academic habits of thinking and analytical practices, and drawing from content standards to ensure language is taught within rich, contextualized, and meaningful circumstances
* Is delivered during a dedicated instructional time
* Is grounded on collaboration with content area teachers, connecting to content area instruction to effectively monitor student progress and plan instruction that maximizes English learners’ learning
* Is tailored to students’ previous experiences, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, language development needs and grade level expectations
* Is situated within coherent English Learner Education programs where all educators who teach English learners share responsibility for students’ success and promote language development based on their respective areas of expertise
* Is supported by appropriate scheduling, including dedicated collaboration between content and area teachers

***It is important to note that collaboration between ESL and content area teachers is essential for promoting EL success in all language programs.***

## Foundational Understanding 2: The *WHY* - Theory of Action and Features of ESL Instruction

The Theory of Action articulated in the NGESL project, informed by data and research, continues to ground this Next Generation ESL Initiative. It provides a core set of priority beliefs that can be operationalized when developing ESL curricula, instruction, and assessment aligned to represents the state’s definition of ESL instruction.

Following research on best practices, Next Generation ESL initiatives promote:

1. Building the capacity of ESL educators to deliver instructional that is purposefully scaffolded, informed by students’ needs and targeted to high expectations,
2. Integrating English language development and content standards, practices, and context across the curriculum,
3. Building asset-oriented school cultures where all educators share responsibility for supporting and sustaining EL student’s cultures, and academic and linguistic development, and
4. Developing an understanding of how language is action with each unique sociocultural context.

Additionally, Next Generation ESL initiatives are grounded in the following four beliefs as articulated in the Next Generation ESL Theory of Action:[[1]](#footnote-1)

* **Shared responsibility, expertise, and collaboration leads to EL achievement**. By coordinating and collaborating in planning ESL and content curricula, educators will support one another, share unique fields of expertise within curriculum planning, and take collective responsibility for EL achievement.
* **Educator inquiry, curricular innovation, testing, and reflection cycles lead to continuous improvement and stronger implementation of curricula.** By engaging in a process of continuous improvement as they develop and revise next generation ESL curricula, educators will collaboratively and continuously lead, evaluate, and improve curriculum development (Metz, 2016). This will result in scaling-up of evidence-based practices for ESL in classrooms and schools across the state.
* **Learner assets serve as important teaching resources.** By capitalizing on the experiences, prior knowledge, languages, cultures, and backgrounds ELs bring to learning, and by using their linguistic and cultural profiles in curricular design, educators can instruct students more responsively, resulting in increased student agency, understanding of multiple perspectives, and stronger critical lenses with which students can evaluate and advocate important issues.
* **Language is action within each unique sociocultural context.[[2]](#footnote-2)** Next generation ESL promotes development of language as action. By focusing next generation ESL curricula on the developmental and functional nature of language learning within a range of academic and social contexts through authentic, interactive learning experiences and real-world transfer and application, the implementation of these units will help students understand their own language development as being more than a set of forms and features. Instead, students will learn to see their developing language as growing sets of tools for meaning-making leveraged through action to achieve their own goals.

In connection to this Theory of Action and research on best practices for teaching English learners, Next Generation ESL promotes instruction and curriculum that incorporates these features:

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| --- | --- |
| **Features of High-Quality ESL Instruction** | |
|  | **Asset-based and culturally sustaining**  Leverages what students bring and can do for learning and strengthens students’ identity and self-efficacy |
|  | **Language driven**  Promotes students’ ability to use English for academic, social, and instructional purposes |
|  | **Standards-based, rigorous, and integrated**  Aligned to ELD and content area standards, with purposeful tasks appropriate to students’ grade levels and explicit teaches strategies for thinking and using language |
|  | **Designed for authentic language interactions, dialogue, and collaboration**  Provides ample and prolonged opportunities for substantive conversations and collaboration around big ideas and topics connected to content areas, college and career, and civic life |
|  | **Balanced, focused on both meaning and form**  Makes language visible, teaching it explicitly in rich, contextualized, and meaningful circumstances |
|  | **Planned and dynamic**  Follows carefully planned units and lessons sequenced to develop language coherently over time and incorporates just in time adjustments based on student progress |
|  | **Differentiated and scaffolded**  Tailored to individual students’ characteristics and providing supports as needed to build autonomy |
|  | **Grounded on effective assessment practices**  Uses information from student work and multiple assessments (formative, benchmark, summative, etc.) to keep learning moving forward |
| *Icons by* [*Freepik*](file:///C:\Users\abvau\Downloads\div%3eIcons%20made%20by%20%3ca%20href=%22https:\www.freepik.com%22%20title=%22Freepik%22%3eFreepik%3c\a%3e%20from%20%3ca%20href=%22https:\www.flaticon.com\%22%20title=%22Flaticon%22%3ewww.flaticon.com%3c\a%3e%3c\div)*,* [*Smashicons*](https://smashicons.com/)*,* [*Eucalyp*](file:///C:\Users\abvau\Downloads\Eucalyp)*,* [*iconixar*](file:///C:\Users\abvau\Downloads\div%3eIcons%20made%20by%20%3ca%20href=%22%22%20title=%22iconixar%22%3eiconixar%3c\a%3e%20from%20%3ca%20href=%22https:\www.flaticon.com\%22%20title=%22Flaticon%22%3ewww.flaticon.com%3c\a%3e%3c\div) *and* [*Kiranshastry*](file:///C:\Users\abvau\Downloads\div%3eIcons%20made%20by%20%3ca%20href=%22%22%20title=%22Kiranshastry%22%3eKiranshastry%3c\a%3e%20from%20%3ca%20href=%22https:\www.flaticon.com\%22%20title=%22Flaticon%22%3ewww.flaticon.com%3c\a%3e%3c\div) | |

For more information about the Next Generation ESL Model Curriculum Units showcasing the Theory of Action and features, see the [Next Generation ESL Curriculum Resource Guide](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/instruction/) and explore the [ESL Model Curriculum Units and companion videos.](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/instruction/mcu/)

## Foundational Understanding 3: The *HOW* - ESL Instructional Delivery Approaches

Every English learner deserves intellectually rigorous, rich, meaningful, deep learning experiences through ESL instruction. This means that no matter the background (newcomer, long-term English learner, English learner with disability, etc.), district characteristics (low, mid, or high incidence of English learners), or English Learner Education program model (Sheltered English Immersion, Transitional Bilingual Education, etc.), educators should structure and promote high quality ESL instruction. In practice this means that the *what*, or expectations for ESL instruction, are the same for all English learners across districts, even if the way in which instruction is delivered (the *how*) may vary by context, size of district, and instructional delivery approach (to learn more about expectations for English Learners, see the Massachusetts [Vision for English Learner Education and Blueprint for English Learner Success](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/), especially Pillars 2 and 3).

ESL instructional delivery approaches describe how ESL instruction is arranged at the classroom level. These instructional delivery approaches differ from English Learner Education program models such as Sheltered English Instruction and Transitional Bilingual Education. These program models describe the full experience of English learners throughout the school day as structured in different schools and districts. Program models for English learners in Massachusetts encompass two main components, ESL instruction and sheltered content area instruction. To learn more about how ESL instruction can be delivered at the classroom level, see the ESL Instructional Delivery Approaches definitions and Quick Reference Guides.

## Foundational Understanding 4: Standards-based ESL Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

Next Generation ESL is grounded in standards-based instruction, curriculum, and assessment. It is important to note that ESL is part of the larger expectations for English Learner Education outlined in the Massachusetts Vision for English Learner Education and Blueprint for EL Success. ESL and Next Generation ESL initiatives are one way in which this vision and expectations are carried out in practical terms to promote EL success. Reaching the MA Vision for ELE education is also connected to strengthening the educational experiences across many other areas such as content instruction, educator preparation, licensure and evaluation, school and district leadership, strategic planning and resource allocation, etc. Some core understandings are:

* ELs at all proficiency levels have the same ability as native and proficient speakers to engage in cognitively complex tasks.
* When ELs receive appropriate support to access ideas, texts, and concepts expressed in English, they are able to simultaneously develop language and academic habits of thinking and disciplinary concepts expected at the student’s particular grade level. Explore the [Blueprint for EL success](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/dashboard.html) to learn more on providing appropriate supports for ELs.
* In order to succeed, ELs must engage with well-designed curriculum that is aligned to the [WIDA ELD Standards](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/instruction/wida.html) and the [Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks](https://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html).
* Motivation and engagement are crucial to learning and should be considered in curriculum development.
* Teaching is planned but must also be considered a complex and dynamic act; effective teaching encompasses excellent formative assessment and is essential to student success. Additionally, [benchmarks](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/resources/benchmarks/) play an important role in informing next steps for the instruction of ELs. Visit the Department’s resources on Benchmarks to learn more about how to [use English Proficiency Benchmarks to guide instruction.](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/resources/benchmarks/)
* All instruction (content area and ESL) is provided by highly qualified educators who are licensed in their respective fields and hold the appropriate [educator endorsements](https://www.doe.mass.edu/licensure/endorsements/) (SEI, Bilingual) as required.
* All educators are responsible for students’ language development and academic achievement. Collaboration and shared responsibility among administrators and educators are integral to student and program success. Given the necessity for meaningful opportunities for educator collaboration, it is essential that time for collaboration is built into school schedules. See [Pillar 1 of the Blueprint for EL Success](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/dashboard.html) for additional information on the importance of shared responsibility.
* Administrators and educators use multiple data points (student achievement, performance, growth, demographics, sociocultural aspects, equity measures within the school, etc.) to inform scheduling of classes, services, supports and curriculum, instruction, and assessment. [Benchmarks](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/resources/benchmarks/) play an important role in informing EL scheduling needs.
* ELs have schedules that permit both ESL instruction and grade-level curriculum and sheltered instruction.[[3]](#footnote-3) Schedules are carefully planned to ensure English learners do not miss core content instruction, since English learners need access to high-quality ESL and core content instruction to be successful and both ESL and content area instruction are legally required components of English Learner Education in Massachusetts
* ESL educators have sustained opportunities to regularly participate in school and district-based quality professional development. Such professional development is differentiated, sustained, embedded with supports, and focused on all aspects of professional growth of the ESL educator, including subject matter as well as content and collaborative practices. See Pillar 2 of the Blueprint for EL Success for additional information on the importance of [high-quality, sustained, professional learning opportunities.](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/dashboard.html)

1. See also: WIDA Essential Action 1 (Gottlieb, 2013, pp. 14–16), WIDA Essential Action 3 (Gottlieb, 2013, pp. 20–24), WIDA Essential Action 5 (Gottlieb, 2013, pp. 28–30), WIDA Essential Action 10 (Gottlieb, 2013, pp. 43–45), WIDA Essential Action 11 (Gottlieb, 2013, pp. 46–48), and WIDA Essential Actions 14 and 15 (Gottlieb, 2013, pp. 58–66). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. **Van Lier & Walqui, 2012; Walqui, 2012**  [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2019). [Next Generation ESL Project Resource Guide: Foundation and Beliefs.](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/guidance/?section=resource-guide#resource-guide) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)