# Waltham Public Schools: Elementary School ESL Materials

## Contents

**WALTHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS: ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ESL MATERIALS** ..... 1

**Introduction** **2**
The Overall Bottom Line ..... 4

**The Next Generation ESL Curriculum Review Rubric** **6**
**Section A: Curricular Structure** ..... 6
Section B: Student-Centered Instructional Materials ..... 14

## Introduction

This report was drafted using the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's High-Quality Next Generation ESL Instructional Materials (HQIM-NGESL) review process and rubric. The whole review process and rubric supports evaluation of:

- Whether materials provide a full year's worth of dedicated ESL instruction, as determined by the review panel and given the Massachusetts definition of ESL,
- Whether ESL instructional materials are aligned to the WIDA English Language Development Standards Framework, 2020 Edition (henceforth known as the ELD Framework) – and integrated with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, as determined by the review panel, and
- Quality of ESL instructional materials, as interpreted through the HQIM-NGESL rubric.

The full report features a summary of the results of a panel review of the materials. The review of the materials was done during the 2025-2026 convening of the HQIM-NGESL panel. The panel was comprised of Massachusetts district leaders, classroom educators, and representatives from higher education institutions. It is important to note that the report only summarizes the analysis of the Quality of the ESL instructional materials as interpreted through the HQIM-NGESL rubric. It does not guarantee the quality, scope, or thoroughness of the reviewed materials. It also does not endorse the use of the specific materials reviewed, but simply provides a summary of the information shared by the reviewing panel.

The HQIM-NGESL rubric is divided into two sections. Section A focuses on curricular structure and the coherence of the instructional materials for supporting a trajectory of learning for the year. Section B focuses on whether materials are student-centered and the intentional design of the materials for supporting multilingual learners. Each report:

- Opens with a brief description of the materials that is provided by the publisher or the district that submitted the materials for review,
- Includes a quick reference graphic of the ratings for each of the rubric criteria and a summary of the review of the materials, as described by the review panel, and
- Contains overall-level ratings for each of the rubric criteria, as determined by the review panel, and accompanied by descriptive strengths and challenges, and
- Information from the publisher, such as product specifications.

As you review the report, be sure to consider the following:

- The criteria in the rubric represent selected desired aspects of high quality in ESL materials. While comprehensive and useful for selecting, creating, and improving the quality of ESL instructional materials, the rubric is not, nor can it be, exhaustive. There may be additional criteria your evaluation team determines important to add, based on local needs, EL data, backgrounds, and educator

needs. Data may inform your creation of additional criteria and indicators in the evidence gathering process.

- The report can help teams determine whether they should adopt the ESL Instructional Materials, adopt the ESL Instructional Materials with supplemental guidance and materials to address gaps in quality, adopt materials and create a local plan to address gaps in quality, or to not adopt. HQIM-NGESL reports are only one component of a robust and transparent process to investigate and select high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) for your localized context. Explore our IMplement MA website to learn more about DESE's inclusive four-phase process, resources, and opportunities to support strong selection of high-quality instructional materials that is grounded in a shared vision, informed by localized equity priorities, and supported by diverse stakeholders.

**The Overall Bottom Line**

**Section A: Curricular Structure**
Alignment to MA Definition of ESL – 2
Curricular Map – 1
Unit Language Goals – 1
Lesson Objectives – 1
Assessment – 1
Functional Approach – 2
Shared Responsibility – 1

**Section B – Student-centered Instructional Materials**
Asset-based Orientation – 1
Linguistically Responsive – 1
Critical Stance – 1
Oral Language Development – 1
Formative Assessment – 1
Scaffolds and Supports – 1
Universal Design and Accessibility - 1

4: Evidence is clear and comprehensive; clear connection to four indicators
3: Evidence is present; clear connection to three indicators
2: Evidence is present but insufficient; clear connection to two indicators
1: Evidence is not sufficiently present; connection to one or fewer indicators

**Summary of the Bottom Line**
The reviewed elementary school materials demonstrate a strong foundational framework for supporting multilingual learners through alignment to the WIDA ELD Framework, integration of grade-level ELA standards, and the incorporation of Open Up/EL Education resources. The materials consistently show evidence of standards alignment, engaging thematic content, and opportunities for language development through performance tasks, Language Dives, collaborative discussions, and student-friendly language expectations. The materials also reflect a commitment to inquiry-based learning and culturally relevant themes such as human rights, leadership, and social justice. In particular, the curriculum's emphasis on integrating language development with authentic academic content provides a promising basis for a comprehensive ESL instructional program.

It is important to note that at the time of review the materials were still under development- which presents coherence challenges that could potentially limit the materials' effectiveness as a fully realized HQIM-NGESL program. Since the materials are still in development, much of the student experience depends heavily on teacher expertise, local adaptation, and access to external Open Up resources rather than

consistently embedded curriculum structures. Reviewers noted uneven resource availability across modules, insufficient clarity around lesson-level language objectives, inconsistent scaffolding and formative assessment practices, and limited interdisciplinary integration beyond ELA. In addition, supports for culturally and linguistically diverse learners, oral language development, collaboration systems, and accessibility for multilingual learners with disabilities could be strengthened by further development.

# The Next Generation ESL Curriculum Review Rubric

## Section A: Curricular Structure

**Alignment to Massachusetts Definition of ESL – 2**
Materials demonstrate clear alignment with the Massachusetts definition of ESL, integrating language development with grade-level content and the ELD Framework

**Strengths:** The materials demonstrate evidence of several indicators of alignment to the Massachusetts definition of ESL. All units include ELA Framework Standards, WIDA ELD Framework Standards, and identified language features, showing a deliberate effort to integrate language development with grade-level content. Module overviews consistently identify essential questions, key language uses, and language expectations. The curriculum map clearly positions English language development within grade-level disciplinary learning, particularly through the integration of WIDA language functions and student-friendly language expectations. Evidence from the Fifth Grade ESL Curriculum Draft shows evidence of units explicitly unpacking language expectations connected to grade-level standards and WIDA Framework features. Additionally, reviewers noted that the materials simultaneously develop language and content and attends to language development for academic and instructional purposes.

**Challenges:** Despite these strengths, the materials are still in draft form and therefore at times lack coherence and explicitness in implementation. Reviewers repeatedly noted that at times it was difficult to determine if language development was driving instruction. Although the curriculum map appears strong at a macro level, lesson-level implementation remains unclear. Several units lacked accessible and/or available resources, particularly beyond Module 1, making it difficult to evaluate how language development is operationalized within instruction across the full set of materials. Reviewers noted that at times it was unclear if the materials submitted for review were an ESL curriculum or simply an adaptation of Open Up ELA materials. There was also concern that interdisciplinary content was limited, with the majority of units focusing on Language Arts and minimal evidence of Math, Science, or Social Studies integration. Furthermore, since the materials are still in development at the time of review, it appears as if they depend heavily on teacher teams to design instructional experiences, resulting in potential inconsistency across classrooms and schools.

**Bottom Line:** The instructional materials establish a solid conceptual foundation for alignment to the Massachusetts definition of ESL through standards integration and language expectations. However, schools and educators using these may benefit from clearer implementation guidance, resource consistency, and explicit language-focused

instructional design to ensure that the materials are designed to support the systemic, explicit, sustained focus on language development.

**Curricular Map – 1**
Materials Provide a clear, year-long curricular map that demonstrates a coherent progression of language development aligned with grade-level content.

**Strengths:** The curricular map provides a detailed year-long sequence of modules and units aligned to WIDA standards and grade-level content. The Fifth Grade ESL Curriculum includes module overviews, unit plans, standards alignment, key language uses, and student-friendly language expectations. The User Guide explains that each unit connects to a content area and a key language use from the WIDA Frameworks, and that language functions are unpacked into student-friendly expectations. Open Up resources provide daily learning targets, ongoing assessments, and teacher guidance documents that support instructional planning. Reviewers also noted evidence of unit progression and scaffolding, including vocabulary supports, graphic organizers, and performance-based tasks.

**Challenges:** The curricular map lacks clarity regarding lesson-level outcomes and coherence across disciplines. Most units emphasize Language Arts standards, with limited representation of Science and Social Studies and no Math standards present. Reviewers found it difficult to determine whether lesson outcomes systematically built toward annual benchmarks because many lesson-level language objectives were not explicitly identified. In addition, resource availability was highly inconsistent across modules; Modules 3 and 4 often contained only end-of-unit assessments with few additional supports. The panelists noted that the relationship between the Waltham ESL materials and Open Up resources was not consistently transparent, causing a lack of clarity around what materials were being used- which could lead to inconsistent implementation.

**Bottom Line:** The curricular map offers a promising structure and demonstrates thoughtful standards alignment, but clearer articulation of lesson progression, interdisciplinary balance, and embedded resource accessibility could ensure coherence and consistency across implementation contexts.

**Unit Language Goals – 1**
Materials present clearly defined unit-level language goals that integrate content standards with language development, providing a coherent focus of instruction over several weeks.

**Strengths:** The curriculum includes strong examples of student-friendly language expectations and explicit alignment to WIDA language functions and ELA standards. Each unit identifies WIDA Framework standards/functions and corresponding language features. Module overviews include major language learning experiences and essential questions, and units appear to provide a reasonable instructional timeframe for students to explore and apply new language learning. Reviewers noted that unit goals are connected to high-leverage ELA standards and unpacked into meaningful language features.

**Challenges:** Although language expectations are present, reviewers consistently noted confusion between language expectations and language goals. The materials do not consistently and clearly define unit-level language goals, and the instructional throughline from WIDA features to student-facing expectations is inconsistent. Some units demonstrate strong alignment between language features and objectives, while others do not, leaving areas that lack clarity which could potentially lead to inconsistent implementation. Additionally, reviewers observed that the materials often track more closely to the pacing and goals of the ELA curriculum than to explicit ESL language development goals.

**Bottom Line:** The materials contain many of the components necessary for strong unit-level language instruction, particularly through WIDA integration and student-friendly expectations. However, clearer articulation and consistency of unit language goals could create a more coherent and explicitly language-driven instructional framework.

**Lesson Objectives – 1**
Materials provide clear, actionable lesson-level language objectives that directly support progress toward unit language goals and can be reasonably accomplished within a single lesson.

**Strengths:** Open Up resources provide daily learning targets, lesson agendas, opportunities for self-assessment, and prompts for reviewing lesson targets with students. The ESL lesson planning template and unit planning template also support instructional planning. Reviewers identified lesson objectives as a strength of Open Up's curriculum, particularly because lessons prompt students to monitor their own progress and align with broader unit expectations.

**Challenges:** The district-created materials themselves did not consistently include explicit lesson-level language objectives. Much of the evidence of lesson objectives came from Open Up resources rather than the Waltham curriculum documents- the panelists noted that the OpenUp resources were designed for use in an ELA classroom and not an ELD classroom. Reviewers noted that resource organization was at times confusing and that many linked documents were inaccessible. As a result, at times it was difficult to verify alignment with all lesson-objective indicators. Reviewers also emphasized that instructional design work remains dependent on teacher teams.

**Bottom Line:** The materials that the ELD curriculum is based on contain strong lesson structures embedded within Open Up materials, but the district materials need clearer integration and explicit articulation of lesson-level language objectives to ensure consistency and usability of the materials in an ESL classroom.

**Assessment – 1**
Materials include an assessment system that provides multiple opportunities to measure language growth, aligns with curriculum goals and standards, and informs long-term instructional planning.

**Strengths:** The materials include end-of-unit and end-of-module assessments, many of which integrate writing and speaking tasks. Rubrics aligned to WIDA language charts are embedded into assessments, and Open Up resources provide ongoing, mid-unit, and end-of-unit assessments with teacher guidance. Performance tasks, such as narrative e-books and oral presentations, demonstrate opportunities for multimodal language use. The materials also reference collaborative teacher review processes during LAT and CPT meetings.

**Challenges:** Reviewers found insufficient evidence of a coherent language assessment system specifically designed to measure language growth. Assessments often appeared more aligned to ELA content standards than to explicit WIDA ELD objectives. Many linked assessments were inaccessible, making it difficult to evaluate alignment across indicators.

**Bottom Line:** The materials demonstrate a strong foundation for assessment through performance tasks and standards alignment, but educators using the materials may need to supplement the materials to ensure that the assessment system provides greater coherence, accessibility, and explicit focus on measuring language development across domains.

**Functional Approach – 2**
Materials implement a purpose-driven approach to language development that explicitly links language forms and functions to communicative goals across academic disciplines.

**Strengths:** The materials demonstrate evidence of several functional language practices, including Language Dives, disciplinary language analysis, and alignment to WIDA language functions. Open Up materials provide opportunities for students to analyze sentence structure, language patterns, and disciplinary genres within meaningful ELA contexts. Reviewers noted that Language Dives are a particularly strong instructional routine for multilingual learners.

**Challenges:** The materials primarily support language development within ELA contexts rather than across academic disciplines. Reviewers found limited evidence of explicit opportunities for using language across Science, Social Studies, and Math. Resource inconsistencies and inaccessible links also limited reviewers' evaluation. Additionally, at the time of the review, many instructional decisions around implementation were left to teacher discretion rather than explicitly embedded in the materials.

**Bottom Line:** The materials demonstrate promising functional language practices, especially through Language Dives and disciplinary language analysis, but educators and schools using these materials may need to consider broader interdisciplinary integration and more explicit guidance to fully realize a comprehensive functional approach to ESL instruction.

**Shared Responsibility – 1**
Materials promote shared expertise, responsibility, and accountability for students in the program.

**Strengths:** The User Guide references collaboration between ESL and classroom teachers through LAT and CPT meetings and notes that language expectations can support both ESL and content teachers. The materials also mention co-teaching models and collaborative unit planning processes.

**Challenges:** Reviewers found little explicit evidence of structured collaboration systems or accountability mechanisms. Although collaboration is implied throughout the curriculum, there are few concrete tools, protocols, or expectations guiding how teachers should collaboratively analyze data, co-plan instruction, or monitor student progress.

**Bottom Line:** The materials acknowledge the importance of collaboration and shared responsibility, but currently lack explicit systems, tools, and guidance necessary to ensure sustainable and consistent collaborative practices across educators.

## Section B: Student-Centered Instructional Materials

**Asset-based Orientation – 1**
Materials consistently promote an asset-based approach, actively incorporating and building upon students' diverse backgrounds, languages, cultures, experiences, knowledge, and interests to enhance language development and content learning.

**Strengths:** The materials contain engaging themes such as human rights, natural disasters, and athlete leaders of social change. Reviewers noted some resources specifically designed for Spanish-speaking multilingual learners, including Spanish read-alouds and affix comparisons. Open Up materials also include "Supporting MLs" notes within lessons.

**Challenges:** Reviewers found limited evidence of broad cultural and linguistic representation beyond Spanish-speaking learners. Explicit tools or guidance for integrating students' cultural assets and funds of knowledge were largely absent. Asset-based approaches appeared dependent on teacher incorporation rather than embedded curriculum structures.

**Bottom Line:** The materials demonstrate an initial commitment to asset-based practices through engaging themes and selected multilingual supports, but teachers using these materials may need to consider additional ways for more intentional and systematic incorporation of diverse linguistic and cultural identities.

**Linguistically Responsive – 1**
Materials consistently promote linguistically responsive practices, actively supporting the use of students' full linguistic resources while facilitating English language development across all domains (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).

**Strengths:** The materials include some translanguaging supports and Spanish-language resources, such as read-alouds, affix studies, and translated UDHR materials. These resources provide opportunities to leverage students' home languages in support of learning.

**Challenges:** Reviewers found minimal evidence of explicit metalinguistic instruction, language transfer strategies, or support for maintaining home languages beyond Spanish. Resources were heavily concentrated in early modules, and later units lacked similar supports, which may be attributed to the fact that the materials are still in development. Linguistically responsive instruction appeared inconsistent throughout the materials at the time of review.

**Bottom Line:** The materials contain promising examples of linguistically responsive supports, but these opportunities are inconsistent and not embedded systematically enough to meet the needs of multilingual learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

**Critical Stance – 1**
Materials consistently foster a critical stance, encouraging students to use language as a tool for inquiry, analysis, and action on issues relevant to their lives and communities.

**Strengths:** The materials integrate themes of human rights, leadership, equity, and social justice. Units centered on Esperanza Rising, Jackie Robinson, and social change provide opportunities for inquiry and critical analysis. Performance tasks encourage students to question inequities and engage with authentic social issues. Reviewers also noted EL Education's embedded emphasis on collaboration, inquiry, and habits of character.

**Challenges:** While themes promote critical thinking, reviewers noted that explicit instruction on how language supports agency, advocacy, and critical analysis is less visible. Much of the critical stance work appears embedded in EL Education rather than explicitly articulated in the district curriculum. Student-generated inquiry opportunities are also inconsistently represented.

**Bottom Line:** The materials include some opportunities to support critical engagement through relevant themes and inquiry-based tasks, but clearer connections between language development and critical action could help strengthen opportunities for fostering critical stance and student agency.

**Oral Language Development – 1**
Materials provide daily, structured opportunities for all students to engage in meaningful oral interactions that develop listening and speaking skills for social and academic purposes.

**Strengths:** The materials include oral language standards, expressive WIDA language functions, monologue performance tasks, and discussion-based activities embedded within Open Up resources. EL Education's instructional design emphasizes collaborative discussions and oral engagement connected to learning objectives.

**Challenges:** Reviewers found insufficient evidence of systematic daily oral language structures and scaffolds for multilingual learners. While speaking opportunities exist, explicit supports for leveraging students' linguistic assets during oral interaction are inconsistent. Oral language routines often depend on teacher implementation rather than embedded curriculum supports.

**Bottom Line:** The curriculum provides some oral language opportunities through discussions and presentations, but educators using these materials may need to consider more systematic and explicit oral language development structures.

**Formative Assessment - 1**
Materials integrate formative assessment practices throughout instruction, providing tools and strategies for teachers and students to monitor learning, adjust teaching, and support language growth in real time.

**Strengths:** The materials include lesson templates with formative assessment planning spaces and Open Up resources with ongoing checks for understanding, note-catchers, and discussion routines. Self-assessment and peer reflection opportunities are also embedded in EL Education materials.

**Challenges:** Reviewers found limited evidence of explicit formative assessment systems focused on language development. Most formative assessment examples centered on content learning rather than language growth. Guidance for teachers on how to analyze language use and adjust instruction was minimal.

**Bottom Line:** The curriculum includes foundational formative assessment structures, but educators using these materials may need to provide stronger language-focused assessment guidance and embedded examples to support ongoing monitoring of multilingual learners' language development.

**Scaffolds and Supports – 1**
Materials provide a range of scaffolding strategies and supports that assist students in accessing grade-level content and developing language, with guidance on how to gradually remove supports as students gain proficiency.

**Strengths:** The materials include numerous scaffolds in early modules, including modified texts, visuals, sentence supports, graphic organizers, Spanish read-alouds, and Language Dives. Open Up lessons also provide “For Lighter Support” and “For Heavier Support” teacher guidance. Reviewers noted that the Language Dives could be leveraged for effective scaffolding for multilingual learners.

**Challenges:** Scaffolds are inconsistently embedded across modules, with later units lacking the same level of support. Many scaffold resources were inaccessible, limiting evaluation. Reviewers emphasized that teacher teams would benefit from professional development to consistently implement scaffolding practices effectively.

**Bottom Line:** The instructional materials demonstrate strong potential through scaffold examples and Language Dive routines, but educators using these materials may need to be mindful to ensure that scaffolds are systematically embedded across all modules and supported through explicit implementation guidance.

**Universal Design and Accessibility – 1**
Materials provide varied means for accessing the content and demonstrating learning, helping teachers meet the diverse needs and abilities of a variety of students, including those with different abilities and those working above or below grade level.

**Strengths:** Open Up materials incorporate UDL principles throughout lessons, including multiple means of representation, discussion opportunities, visual supports, and multimodal performance tasks. Module 1 resources demonstrate strong examples of accessible supports, including visuals, modified texts, and multilingual resources.

**Challenges:** UDL implementation is inconsistent across modules, and supports are heavily concentrated in the first module. Guidance for supporting multilingual learners with disabilities is minimal. Reviewers also noted that multilingual supports were largely limited to Spanish-speaking learners.

**Bottom Line:** The instructional materials demonstrate strong UDL principles within Open Up resources and early modules, but schools and educators using these materials may need more consistent accessibility supports and explicit guidance for diverse multilingual learners and students with disabilities.