**Overview**

Early literacy refers to the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills for young learners in preschool through grade 3. In particular, [evidence based early literacy](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/about.html) instruction focuses on building [oral language](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/literacy-block/oral-language.html) development alongside [foundational skills](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/skilled-reading/) in early reading and writing. A [culturally responsive and sustaining](https://www.doe.mass.edu/odl/e-learning/culturally-resp-sust/content/index.html#/) pedagogical approach to support an [equitable pathway](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/pathway-to-equity.html) to early literacy should leverage the [heritage language(s)](https://www.cal.org/heritage/pdfs/briefs/What-is-a-Heritage-Language.pdf) whenever possible and be intentional in maintaining relationships that [partner with families](https://masfec.org/dese-office-of-student-and-family-support/).

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| **Potential Strengths and Common Challenges for Developing Early Literacy Skills of PK-3 English Learners** |
| **Strengths*** Multilingual and literacy skills in heritage language can transfer to support development of English skills
* Students can use resources across two languages to communicate and make sense of the world
* PK-3 English learners often possess strong oral language skills in two or more languages
* High-quality early literacy instruction and support PK-3 English learners’ development of meta-linguistic awareness
 | **Challenges*** Distinguishing whether difficulties in developing foundational literacy skills are related to language development, a learning disability, or both can be challenging
* Limited bilingual instructional and curricular resources to support culturally responsive and sustaining instruction
* PK-3 English learners face systemic barriers to achieving literacy development and academic success (inadequate teacher education, lack of access to bilingual programs, etc.)
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**Strategies and Best Practices**

Culturally responsive and sustaining literacy [instruction in the early years](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/FocusOn-EY-Supporting-Early-Literacy-Development.pdf) should include rich oral language development and incorporate all components of the [Mass Literacy](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/) [core literacy block](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/literacy-block/default.html). Below are a few useful strategies and practices educators can use to develop young English learners’ literacy:

* **Provide a language and literacy rich classroom by explicitly teaching across communication modes.** The [WIDA English Language Development Standards Framework, 2020 edition](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/WIDA-ELD-Standards-Framework-2020.pdf) highlights interpretive communication modes (listening, reading, and viewing) and expressive communication modes (speaking, writing, and representing) as important to language development. A [learning center approach](https://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/learning-centers-shared) and integration of language and content can be a helpful way to address communicative modes in PreK-3.
* **Implement culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogies.** English learners have varying cultural and linguistic backgrounds, thus representation of individual students’ cultural and linguistic identities in curricular materials is important. Educators can include high quality and diverse picture books to create a more culturally responsive classroom for young learners. Moreover, teachers can [leverage and value students’ heritage language](https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/translanguaging-resources/resources-for-work-with-particular-subgroups/young-emergent-bilinguals-tips-from-cuny-nysieb/)s. They can use a translanguaging pedagogy and encourage students to use related practices. Teachers can also design paired literacy instruction to develop oral language, reading, and writing in English and students’ heritage languages.

**Resources Supporting Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Pedagogies**

* [Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/culturally-responsive/): Look fors, classroom videos, and teaching rubric
* [CUNY-NYSIEB Guide to Translanguaging in Latino/a Literature](https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/CUNY-NYSIEB-Latino-Literature-Guide-Final-January-2015.pdf): books representing Latino/a heritage
* [Diverse Book Finder](https://diversebookfinder.org/books/): database searchable by various backgrounds
* [Global Storybooks Portal](https://globalstorybooks.net/): illustrated stories in multiple languages
* [International Digital Children’s Library](http://www.childrenslibrary.org/library/books_by_language.html): children’s books in over 70 languages
* **Encourage oral interaction through collaborative work**. For example, use [peer reading groups](https://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/using-paired-reading-increase), [bilingual repeated reading activities](https://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/read-again-comprehension-strategies), [collaborative group discussions](https://www.colorado.edu/center/bueno/sites/default/files/attached-files/collaborative_group_structures_for_oracy.pdf), modified [Collaborative Reasoning Groups](https://claves3.files.wordpress.com/2016/09/zhang-stahl-2011.pdf), and collaborative small group/partner based activities with same age or older/mentor partners, such as [co-creating a digital story](https://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/digitally-telling-story-greek). These activities can happen in mixed language, same language, and groups that include English learners as well as non-English learners**.**
* **Encourage home literacy practices and** [**family engagement**](https://wida.wisc.edu/teach/learners/engagement)**.** Providelists of bilingual books, bilingual discussion prompts and activities, and parallel texts and/or supplemental materials in students’ heritage language(s) for students to bring home and engage in with families. Talk about the benefits of literacy development in English and heritage languages to dispel the myth that developing and maintaining heritage language can interfere with learning English.

**Resources for Discussing Benefits of Bilingualism with Families**

* [Myths about Early Childhood Bilingualism](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276407358_Myths_About_Early_Childhood_Bilingualism)
* [National Association for the Education of Young Children Statement on Linguistic and Cultural Diversity](https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/position-statements/diversity.pdf)
* [Working with Young Emergent Bilinguals: Tips from CUNY-NYSIEB](https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/translanguaging-resources/resources-for-work-with-particular-subgroups/young-emergent-bilinguals-tips-from-cuny-nysieb/)
* **Incorporate** [**home visits**](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/making-your-first-ell-home-visit-guide-classroom-teachers) **to build and maintain relationships with families.** These can also help provide space to affirm and welcome cultural differences and linguistic variation and develop student-teacher-family-community interactions.
* **Engage in** [**data-based decision making**](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/leading-mtss/data-based-decision.html) **and use** [**early literacy screening assessments**](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/screening-assessments.html) **to monitor English learners’ progress during the core literacy block.** Review [K-3 foundational skills](https://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/observation/foundational-skills.pptx) development and examine progress by comparison to [true peers](https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1078&context=edu_fac) (students who share similar characteristics) to determine whether any challenges are a function of potential [reading difficulties](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/reading-difficulties/), language acquisition, or both.

**Suggestions for Low, Middle and High-Incidence Districts**

* **Educators serving young learners in high-incidence districts can** develop specific programs and supports for young newcomers. This can be especially important for [students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE)](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/slife/) in grades 2-3, who might need additional support around learning school “norms” and may not be used to full school days.
* **Educators serving young English learners in low and mid-incidence districts can** center the voices of young Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students in unit and lesson planning and provide a [classroom space that nurtures resilience and joy](https://www.embracerace.org/resources/nurturing-resilience-and-joy-in-among-young-bipoc-children-part-2). Educators can teach about race through literacy opportunities even in classrooms with [few multilingual BIPOC students](https://www.ericapernell.com/teaching-race-bipoc).
* **Educators across all districts can** implement [family literacy programming](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/creating-programs-language-minority-families-0), such as access to bilingual libraries that might include books in English used in classrooms and parallel text in heritage languages. This can encourage home literacy practices, demonstrate value for heritage language, and further develop student-teacher-family-community interaction.

**Actions-at-a-Glance**

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| **Actions for Classroom Educators** |
| * Use interactive read classroom read alouds to engage in active discussion around [complex texts](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/literacy-block/complex-text/choosing-using.html) promote development of early reading skills including [vocabulary and morphology](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/skilled-reading/language-comprehend/vocab-morphology.html), [knowledge](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/skilled-reading/language-comprehend/knowledge.html), [syntax](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/skilled-reading/language-comprehend/syntax.html), and other [higher-level language skills](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/skilled-reading/language-comprehend/higher-level-language.html). Provide opportunities for students to [respond to text](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/literacy-block/complex-text/responding.html).
* Use children’s books that have a parallel text in students’ heritage language(s) and read both texts in the classroom and/or read the English one in the classroom and have students take the ones in other languages to read at home.
* Use bilingual materials in the classroom and share them with families, especially for students at English language proficiency levels 1-3. [2lingual](https://2lingual.com/) is a helpful tool for finding materials that utilize students’ heritage language(s) and NewsELA is helpful for finding information texts in both English and Spanish.
* Use the [Learning for Justice Standards](https://www.learningforjustice.org/frameworks/social-justice-standards) alongside [Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks](https://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html) and [WIDA English Language Development Standards Framework](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/WIDA-ELD-Standards-Framework-2020.pdf) to develop early reading skills and promote academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical awareness.
* Draw on the [Culturally Responsive Look Fors](https://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/calibration/look-fors.docx) to assess your own teaching and student interactions.
* Draw on the Kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grades 2-3 [WIDA Language Expectations](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/Website/News/2021/February/WIDA-StandardsFAQ-LanguageExpectations.pdf) to develop [language objectives](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/language-objectives-key-effective-content-area-instruction-english-learners) that target early reading skills such as [phonological awareness](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/skilled-reading/fluent-word-reading/phonological-awareness.html), [phonics and decoding](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/skilled-reading/fluent-word-reading/phonics-decoding.html), and [advanced phonics](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/skilled-reading/fluent-word-reading/advanced-phonics.html) as well as [systematic and explicit writing instruction](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/literacy-block/writing/structure.html) that focuses on [craft](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/literacy-block/writing/craft.html) and [process.](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/literacy-block/writing/process.html)
* Develop a [language and literacy rich classroom](http://www.earlyliteracylearning.org/ta_pdf/SelfGuided_Module_LRE.pdf) to promote [automatic word recognition](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/skilled-reading/fluent-word-reading/word-recognition.html). Post word walls that are [anti-racist](https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/teaching-strategies/word-work/word-wall), interactive, and [multilingual](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jHgoy6iZQpM).
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| **Actions for School and District Leaders** |
| * [Learn](https://www.colorincolorado.org/sites/default/files/Engaging_ELL_Families_FINAL.pdf) about English learner and [First Language is not English (FLNE](https://gradnation.americaspromise.org/sites/default/files/d8/2017-05/CameToLearn.pdf)) students and their families in your school and district. Gather information about languages spoken by young English learners using a [language profile guide](https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/NYSLanguageProfiles.pdf) and use it to inform [family literacy programming](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/creating-programs-language-minority-families-0).
* Incorporate [common planning time](https://www.theedadvocate.org/how-to-effectively-use-common-planning-time/)to the school schedule so educators (ESL, content area, special education, etc.) [collaboratively and systematic](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/FocusBulletin-Collaboration.pdf)ally are better able to support young English learners during the core literacy block.
* Eliminate barriers that interfere with educator collaboration focused on young English learners.
* Provide funding for bilingual curriculum and books in the language(s) spoken in your district.
* Establish a [multi-tiered system of support](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/leading-mtss/) and an [English learner leadership team](https://www.cuny-nysieb.org/translanguaging-resources/establishing-your-schools-emergent-bilingual-leadership-team/) to address the needs and plan supports for English learners in grades PK-3.
* Ensure [meaningful communication with families](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/english-learner-toolkit/chap10.pdf) and access to [interpreters](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-lep-parents-201501.pdf).
* Provide training, time, and funding for [home visits](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/making-your-first-ell-home-visit-guide-classroom-teachers).
* Develop [family school literacy partnerships](https://library.ncte.org/journals/LA/issues/v90-6/23843).
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**Instructional Planning Resources**

## **DESE Practical Tools and Resources**

[Approved Screening Assessments At-a-Glance](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/at-a-glance.docx) provideskey information about each approved screener to support Massachusetts educators in selecting a screening assessment that best fits local need.

[Components of the Core Literacy Block](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/literacy-block/default.html) provides specific examples for supporting the three main components of core literacy: Foundational Skills, Engaging with Complex Text, and Writing.

[Culturally Responsive Teaching Video Library](https://www.doe.mass.edu/edeffectiveness/prof-learning/crt-videos/) provides videos of exemplar culturally responsive teaching (see *Using Texts to Stand Up for What’s Write* forKindergarten, *How Do We Get our Skin Color?* for grade 2, and *Xenophobia and Becoming an Ally* for grade 3).

[English as a Second Language Model Curriculum Units](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/instruction/mcu/) (MCUs) provides sample unit plans and videos for various grade levels and WIDA proficiency levels.

ESL Tools and Resources provides guidance for support effective ESL instruction including the Unit and Lesson Planning Thinking Processes and Templates.

[Mass Literacy Webinar Series](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/topresources/default.html) provide useful overview and introduction to using the Mass Literacy Guide. The Early Literacy for Bilingual Students video can be helpful for supporting English learners in PK-3.

[Skills for Early Reading](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/skilled-reading/default.html) provides detailed resources for supporting students’ fluent word reading and language comprehension.

[Students Experiencing Reading Difficulties](https://www.doe.mass.edu/massliteracy/reading-difficulties/default.html) provides resources for understanding underlying causes of reading difficulties related to fluent word reading and comprehension.

**DESE Guidance**

[Reading Closely to Analyze Complex Texts in the Elementary Grades](https://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/ela/2017-06QRG-Elementary.pdf) examines the close reading instructional practice.

[Early Literacy Universal Screening Assessment Guidance](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/screening-guide.docx) supports educators in selecting high-quality, universal screening assessments.

ESL Best Practices Quick Reference Guides provides guidance on a variety of key topics (formative assessment, racial equity and social justice, etc.) as well as English learner student groups (students designated as long-term English learners, English learners with disabilities, etc.).

[Guidance on Programming for English Learners](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/guidance/?section=guidance) provides general guidance for identification, assessment, placement, and reclassification of English learners (see pages 8-9 on the Guidance on the Initial Identification of English Learners for helpful information about preschool and kindergarten students).

Next Generation ESL Curriculum Resource Guide provides support for collaborative ESL curriculum development, including collaborative tools, processes, protocols, and resources used in the development of ESL MCUs.

**Federal Resources**

[Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in the Elementary Grades](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/20074011.pdf) provides guidance about research-based instruction for English learners.

[Professional Learning Community: Emergent Literacy](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?projectID=4647) provides participant and facilitator guides that can be used independently or with a Professional Learning Community (PLC). It focuses on key components of literacy such as print knowledge, phonological awareness, vocabulary, and oral language.

[Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/english_learners_pg_040114.pdf) provides recommendations for literacy instruction with English learners, including lesson examples and snapshots featured as “exhibits” (see Exhibit 1.2-1.3 and 2.2, which provide a snapshot into effective literacy instruction in a third-grade classroom).

**Other Featured Resources**

[Critical Practices for Anti-Bias Educators](https://www.learningforjustice.org/frameworks/critical-practices) presents a framework and strategies for instruction, classroom culture, family and community engagement, and teacher leadership.

[English Learners and Reading Practices](https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/18/10/english-learners-and-reading-challenges) provides a brief overview of instructional strategies for supporting English learners’ reading development.

[Early Literacy Instruction by ¡Colorín Colorado!](https://www.colorincolorado.org/early-literacy-instruction) provides articles, reports, and videos for supporting literacy for English learners in preschool and kindergarten.

[Learning for Justice Lesson Plan Banks](https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/lessons?keyword=&field_grade_level%5B35%5D=35) presents anti-racist focused lessons by grade level, subject, topic, and/or social justice domain.

[Lotta Lora Lesson Plans](https://literacysquared.org/index.php/lotta-lara-lesson-plans/) provides text lesson plans that promote literacy in Spanish and English through explicit instruction in vocabulary, language structure, and oral language.

[Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care: Dual Language Education Policies and Guidelines](https://www.mass.gov/doc/dual-language-education-policies-and-guidelines-june-2010/download) provides home language surveys helpful for working with preschool children (p. 44) and students in Kindergarten through grade 3 (p.45).

[Reading Instruction in Grades 1-3](https://www.colorincolorado.org/reading-instruction-grades-1-3) provides articles, reports, and videos for supporting reading instruction in early elementary grades.

[Read Think Write Classroom Resources](https://www.readwritethink.org/search/grades/793/grades/795/grades/796/type/643) provides literacy lesson plans and activities that can be searched by grade level, learning objective, and topic.

[The Early Years: Dual Language Learners](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/FocusOn-EY-Dual-Language-Learners.pdf) provides information about literacy development considerations for bilingual children who have not yet entered kindergarten.

[The Early Years: Supporting Early Literacy Development](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/FocusOn-EY-Supporting-Early-Literacy-Development.pdf) provides examples for developing English learners’ oral language and early literacy.

[WIDA English Language Development Standards Framework, 2020 edition](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/WIDA-ELD-Standards-Framework-2020.pdf) provides useful resources for planning ESL instruction (pages 41-104 focus on Kindergarten through grade 3).

[**For additional resources you may wish to consult, click here.**](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/esl-toolkit/tools-resources/)