Focus Topics in Next Generation ESL

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# Focus Topics in Next Generation ESL



## 6.1 State Standards for All Students: EL Considerations

In addition to developing deep knowledge and skill about the process of language acquisition, ESL educators must understand how to interweave academic standards into language instruction.

In “[Application of Common Core State Standards for English Language Learners](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/application-for-english-learners.pdf),”the CCSSO and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices state their strong belief that all students should be held to the same high expectations during instruction. However, they acknowledge that the way students meet these expectations will and should differ based on children’s needs, and that ELs may require more time, appropriate instructional support, and aligned assessments as they acquire both ELP and content area knowledge.

Similarly, the [Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html) include statements about standards-based instruction for ELs.[[1]](#footnote-1) The Frameworks affirm that effectively educating ELs requires:

* Well-prepared and qualified educators.
* Literacy and language-rich environments.
* The use of language proficiency standards in conjunction with the content standards to help ELs become proficient and literate in English.
* Understanding that it is possible for ELs to achieve the standards without manifesting native-like control of conventions and vocabulary.
* Ongoing instructional diagnosing of each student, adjustment of instruction accordingly, and close monitoring of student progress.
* Provision of more time and appropriate instructional support for those students who need it.
* Instruction that develops foundational skills and enables ELs to participate fully in grade-level coursework.
* Understanding that ELs with limited or interrupted schooling will need to acquire background knowledge prerequisite to educational tasks.
* Understanding that students’ native language/s and culture/s knowledge and skills are valuable resources for students, schools, and society, and then building on this enormous reservoir of talent.
* Instruction about how to negotiate situations outside academic settings so they can participate on equal footing with native speakers in all aspects of social, economic, and civic endeavors.

The Massachusetts ELA/Literacy Framework (p. 7) recognizes that

it is beyond the scope of the standards to define the full range of supports appropriate for ELs and for students with special needs. At the same time, all students must have the opportunity to learn and meet the same high standards if they are to access the knowledge and skills necessary in their post-high school lives.

Content and language educators must continue to develop expertise and collaborate to help all ELs gain the necessary knowledge and skills for CCR.

Standards-based expectations also highlight how ESL teachers may need to become increasingly familiar with key content area standards. ESL teachers bring expertise in language, linguistics, and literacy development,[[2]](#footnote-2) but they are in the tricky position of using that expertise in the context of multiple disciplinary academic demands. For example, ESL educators would be well served by developing a thorough familiarity with the [Massachusetts Framework for ELA and Literacy](http://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/fy2017/2016-10/spec-item1-ELA-LitRecs.pdf#search=%22frameworks%20for%20ela%20literacy%22).

The following questions can be used to consider the readiness of ESL teachers to deliver standards-based instruction that incorporates shifts in the Frameworks:

1. Are all ESL teachers thoroughly familiar with the Massachusetts ELA and Literacy standards? This framework is not just for ELA, but also for literacy across content areas.
2. Have ESL teachers had the opportunity to delve deep, unpack, and really understand this framework?
3. Have ESL teachers been part of professional development efforts to further unpack, understand, and strategize teaching around standards and the CCSS shifts?
4. Are ESL teachers only familiar with anchor standards or do they know specific grade-level expectations? ESL teachers who teach multiple grades may need additional support as they gain expertise about grade-level expectations in the standards.

Moreover, as educators incorporate the state standards into ESL curricula, it may be useful for them to keep in mind the following:

* Three major shifts in the new ELA/literacy Frameworks (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010b; Student Achievement Partners, n.d.):
	+ **Regular practice with complex texts and their academic language.**
	+ **Reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from texts, both literary and informational.**
	+ **Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction.**
* The **Fundamental Skill Set** highlighted in the PARCC Model Content Frameworks (Caesar, 2014; Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, 2012), which helps identify critical practices that our students remain engaged in across content areas. Students must be able to:
* Cite evidence.
* Analyze content.
* Study and apply grammar.
* Study and apply vocabulary.
* Conduct discussions.
* Report findings.
* **Key** **areas** within the standards in which to support struggling readers. Achieve the Core’s [*Elements of Success for All with the CCSS: Grades 6–12*](http://achievethecore.org/page/234/elements-of-success-for-all-with-the-ccss-grades-6-12) (Liben & Liben, 2013) outlines how educators can help every student engage with the standards by:
* Addressing fluency for those students who need it.
* Supporting development of academic language proficiency through speaking and listening.
* Supporting development of academic language proficiency through attention to syntax and academic vocabulary in complex text.
* Ensuring that students have opportunities to grow academic vocabulary through word study, close reading, and a volume of reading.
* Providing opportunities for students to read complex text closely and analytically on a regular basis, gradually developing students’ ability to learn from complex text independently.
* Increasing the volume and range of *accountable* reading.
* Helping students use evidence to inform, argue, and analyze (write and speak with support from sources).
* Providing regular opportunities for short, focused research.

Working with content area educators, ESL educators should connect their instructional design and delivery to selected standards from the core content areas to draw learning contexts for developing academic language. As there are multiple demands on ELs and many standards to consider, ESL educators need to collaboratively make choices and clarify priorities. In making these choices, they should focus on key shifts and common analytical and linguistic practices that cut across multiple content areas, such as those identified in the [Key Uses of Language](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/Can-Do-Descriptors-Key-Uses-K-12-FAQs.pdf) and the “[Relationships and Convergences](http://ell.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/VennDiagram_practices_v11%208-30-13%20color.pdf)” diagram.

The [Center on Standards & Assessment Implementation](http://www.csai-online.org) proposes that, in order to strategically prepare ELs for increased language demands across content areas, educators should provide instruction that:

1. Emphasizes use of language in context.
2. Connects with central concepts of content.
3. Connects with standards for practice.
4. Emphasizes ELs’ interaction with other students.
5. Provides avenues for broader modes of communication.
6. Includes educative/formative assessment.

Finally, WIDA has proposed a set of [Essential Actions](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/Essential-Actions-Handbook.pdf) (EAs), or evidence-based strategies, for educators to apply in implementing standards-referenced, language-centered education. Several of these relate to how educators can connect language development of academic practices and grade-level expectations:

* EA 2: Analyze the academic language demands involved in grade-level teaching and learning.
* EA 4: Connect language and content to make learning relevant and meaningful for ELs.
* EA 6: Reference content standards and language development standards in planning for language learning.
* EA 8: Provide opportunities for all ELs to engage in higher order thinking.
* EA 11: Plan for language teaching and learning around discipline-specific topics.

Other EAs also remind educators to keep in mind the developmental nature of language learning (EA5), to design instruction with attention to the sociocultural context (EA7), to allow ample time for language practice (EA9), and to use instructional supports to help scaffold language learning (EA12).

These various pieces of guidance from several state and national organizations point us back to some of the foundational beliefs of this project’s Planning Committee:

* To succeed, ELs must engage with well-designed curricula that are aligned to WIDA and the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.
* 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, we can strategically work toward the simultaneous development of language, analytical practices, skills, and knowledge expected at the students’ particular grade levels.

## 6.2 Text Complexity Analysis Tool

**Introduction to the Text Complexity Analysis Tool**

This adaptation of the Text Complexity Analysis Tool[[3]](#footnote-3) was designed to help educators analyze and select appropriate texts for their Next Generation ESL units and lessons.

Many factors affect text complexity. With increased attention to planning around these factors, teachers can better support their students in accessing and reading different text types and more complex texts.

Planning based on text analysis ensures that English learners will engage with grade-appropriate, complex, interesting, and important texts, as is required to reach our Massachusetts standards (Shanahan, Fisher, & Frey, 2012). By analyzing texts in the curricular design phase, teachers can strategically select texts that are appropriate for instruction given that they:

* Align to and support the Next Generation ESL Focus Language Goals, skills, and knowledge.
* Address students’ second language and literacy growth needs and next steps.
* Assist the teacher to expertly and appropriately scaffold English learners up the “staircase of complexity.”
* Inform the way a teacher will bring together a text, a task, and the reader.

The ESL Text Complexity Analysis Tool is based on a tool originally developed by Student Achievement Partners. The tool enables a three-part measurement for text complexity, presented in the Common Core and Massachusetts standards. The tool prompts evaluation of the *quantitative*, *qualitative,* and *reader/task* considerations in the process of choosing texts.[[4]](#footnote-4) The ESL Text Complexity Analysis Tool includes prompts for ESL teachers to think about how complex texts, tasks, curricular goals and student variables come together. Text analysis ultimately informs selection of texts and design of tasks for supporting students in accessing language and concepts and in making meaning from messages embedded in the texts.

Teachers must consider that what they ask students to do with text (the task) also affects the overall text complexity. Therefore, more complex tasks will require instructional scaffolds and supports for ELs to access the text (e.g., chunking text, excerpting sentences). This justifies noting a common strategy used by educators historically whereby text is simplified to make content comprehensible for English learners in order to decrease the linguistic load for learning about a content or topic. Experts have documented significant overuse of text simplification resulting in English learners losing the opportunity to be exposed to rich and varied discourse, genres, and language in text. ESL teachers must therefore always consider the purpose and outcome for students using particular text. According to the Definition of the Focus of ESL Instruction (see Section 2.2), it is essential for English learners at every proficiency level to have meaningful access to grade-level text and standards. ESL teachers must therefore intentionally design curriculum and focus instructional practices, scaffolding, and instructional supports on assisting students to access and engage productively with a variety of types of texts that are grade-appropriate and represent various levels of complexity and difficulty. In other words, teachers should not only use texts that vary in difficulty and complexity, but the amount of help, guidance, explanation, and scaffolding ought to vary, too.[[5]](#footnote-5) Helping ELs unpack academic texts, through strategically designed instructional tasks, over time, intentionally leads them to gradually and independently internalize an awareness of the relation between specific linguistic features and patterns and the functions that they serve in texts (Fillmore & Fillmore, 2012).

**ESL Text Complexity Analysis Tool**

1. **Quantitative measurement.** Select texts that meet your instructional objective and unit or lesson objectives. Measure text quantitatively online. This can help you to establish lexile level and grade band. Go to <https://lexile.com/educators/find-books-at-the-right-level/lookup-a-books-measure/> and enter the title of your text in the Quick Book Search in the upper right of home page. Most narrative texts will have a Lexile measure in this database.

For more information on other valid quantitative measures for informational text, see ATOS book levels for many informational texts at <http://www.arbookfind.com>. Questar Textbook Readability provides the Degree of Reading Power score. Go to [http://www.questarai.com/products/drpprogram/pages/textbook\_readability.aspx.](http://www.questarai.com/assessments/district-literacy-assessments/degrees-of-reading-power/)

 **QUICK REFERENCE CHART FOR GRADE BAND:**

Score:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Quantitative Tool:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **GRADE BAND** | **LEXILE** | **ATOS** | **QUESTAR-DRP**  |
| 2-3 band  | 420-820L | 2.75-5.14 | 42-54 |
| 4-5 band | 740-1010L | 4.97-7.03 | 52-60 |
| 6-8 band  | 925-1185L | 7.00-9.98 | 57-67 |
| 9-10 band | 1050-1335L | 9.67-12.01 | 62-72 |
| 11-CCR\* band | 1185-1385L | 11.20-14.10 | 67-74 |

 **\* College and Career Ready**

2. **Qualitative measurement.** Consider the four dimensions of text complexity below. For each dimension, note some examples from the text that make it more or less complex for your English language learners.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Meaning/Purpose of Text*** How does it model or connect to the unit Focus Language Goal, key uses of academic language, CCSS shifts, or key academic practices?
* Literal or inferred meaning, explicit or implicit meaning
 | **Structure of Text*** Chronology
* Traits of genre or discipline-specific traits
* Graphics and text features and their functions
 |
| **Language Challenges** * Word level, sentence level, and discourse level
* Consider in conjunction with ELP level
 | **Knowledge Demands** * Prior knowledge expectations
* Sociocultural considerations
 |

Additional exemplars of complexity in texts to consider (August 2013; Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2012):

* Are there multiple levels of meaning in the text? What messages are literal versus inferred? Is the purpose explicit or explicit?
* Is the organization of the text clear? Are time sequences chronological or does the author intentionally distort them?
* Is there a lot of sophisticated figurative language? Use of archaic language?
* Does the author use variations to standard English (e.g., regional variation or dialect)?
* Does the text assume any specialized or technical content knowledge?
* What text features, graphics, and images are used to cue the reader?
* Does the writer use unfamiliar general and domain-specific vocabulary extensively?
* Other: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

3. **Reader and task considerations:**

* + How will I use this text in my unit or lesson? For what instructional purpose? *(Independent reading, close reading, multiple readings, read-aloud, partner reading)*
	+ What will challenge my ELs most in this text?
	+ What will I focus on, that can help my ELs learn from this challenging text?
	+ What opportunities exist in the text? *(Connection to student lives, interest, motivation, cognitively challenging, linguistic connections to L1, cognates, morphology)*What background knowledge must I build? Do I need to pre-teach? How much?
	+ What supplemental texts might students read in support of and/or in conjunction with this text?
	+ What adaptations can I make to this text to provide amplification and clarification of meaning, as opposed to just simplifying the text?[[6]](#footnote-6)
	+ What supports or scaffolding will I need to provide to assist students with this complex text?
	+ How can different tasks I could design with this text help my English learners make better meaning of the text? Does a task create more complexity, or does it help ELs with meaning making?
	+ What implicit text messages or features must I make explicit for my ELs?
	+ How will this text help my students build knowledge about the content context?
	+ How will this text help my ELs with the ESL unit’s Focus Language Goals, academic practices, or with language objectives in this lesson?
	+ Other: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

## 6.3 Universal Design for Learning

In recognizing that students vary in how they learn best, the Next Generation ESL Project: Model Curriculum Units incorporated [UDL](http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl) principles into development process of the units and lessons. The project sought to ensure that units are accessible to all learners. Guidance about UDL was provided to the writing teams, and each unit was reviewed with a UDL lens.

This section presents a brief overview of the ways in which the project incorporated UDL guidelines into the units, a discussion of how this can be used to inform future curriculum development for English learners, and suggestions for supporting variability in the classroom.

**Incorporation of UDL into the Next Generation ESL MCUs**

1. **Intentional design at the unit and lesson levels.** The goal was to develop curricula that are accessible to a range of learning styles and student needs. At the unit level, incorporation of [UDL guidelines](http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/udlguidelines) can be seen throughout Stages 1–3 of the annotated unit template (see Section 5.2):
* In ***Stage 1***, each unit clearly articulates the desired results, or the FLGs. Clear articulation of the goals allows students to monitor their own progress, and gives educators an opportunity to offer options for representation, action and expression, and engagement aligned to these overarching unit goals. Furthermore, each unit has an underlying theme of social justice. This lens promotes student engagement as students become more aware of, and think critically about, the world around them by addressing authentic complex issues.
* In ***Stage 2***, each unit contains clear evaluative criteria and a CEPA (see Section 4.3.2). The evaluative criteria provide a clear articulation of the language expectations for the unit and can promote the student’s monitoring of his/her own learning. The CEPA gives students the opportunity to delve into relevant performance-based tasks, seen through a social justice lens and addressing authentic complex topics of interest. This makes the learning meaningful to students and heightens student engagement, in alignment with UDL Guideline 7, “[*Provide Options for Recruiting Interest*](https://udlguidelines.wordpress.com/principle-iii/guideline-7-provide-options-for-recruiting-interest/).” Guidance for creating performance tasks included specific instruction to ensure that the CEPA was designed to allow the widest possible range of students to participate. As a result, writing teams reflected on how to best ensure accessibility while creating CEPAs. Stage 2 also articulates other evidence such as formative assessments (see Section 4.3.2) used in the unit, which require prior establishment of clear goals to ensure that what is being assessed aligns with the intended objectives for the unit. Each completed unit, along with its lesson plans, provides ample opportunities for contingent formative assessment practices, which can then inform instruction and provide actionable feedback to students.
* In ***Stage 3***, the unit template provides thinking prompts for varying sociocultural implications (see Section 4.4.4). The template prompts writers to consider different ways in which students might express concepts and skills embedded in the unit, and to then provide for multiple pathways for student engagement, representation, and action and expression. This personalizes and makes learning relevant and meaningful for students, and can help educators meet a broad range of learner needs.

At the lesson level, UDL is embedded through various thinking prompts on the annotated lesson plan template (see Section 5.2), again promoting consideration of how the lesson can provide multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement that align with the intended learning goal.

* Reflective thinking prompts can be seen at the lesson level in regard to the selection of resources for the lesson. Writing team members considered various types of supports that could be used, as well as how to best meet the needs of students at varying language proficiency levels, and of various cultural, linguistic, experiential, and academic backgrounds.
* The annotated lesson plan template incorporates thinking prompts to promote a variety of types of assessments, including ample opportunities for ongoing formative assessment, which can be used to provide specific and actionable feedback to students about their progress, inform instruction, and for student self-assessment in relation to the intended learning goal. This variety aligns well with UDL principles, which call for providing students with multiple ways to demonstrate learning and monitor their own progress.
* Prompts for reflecting on student considerations such as sociocultural implications and misconceptions at the lesson level are also included. The template includes “troubleshooting” questions to promote thinking about how to plan responsive instruction and make adjustments as needed. UDL encourages proactive instructional design, where supports are provided to all form the onset of the lesson.
1. **Careful revision:** All units were reviewed through a UDL lens, developed in consultation with CAST. Reviewers began by thinking about the main unit and lesson objectives, what barriers could prevent a student from accessing instruction and achieving unit goals, and how these barriers could be addressed. Once reviews began, each lesson was analyzed with a two-prong approach. First, lesson objectives were evaluated for clarity and alignment with overarching unit FLGs and salient content connections. Then the lesson activities were analyzed to ensure that options for engagement, perception, and action and expression were provided to all students and aligned to the lesson objectives. If the analysis suggested that any of the UDL principles was absent from the lesson, the team reviewed what resources could be incorporated into the lesson to ensure accessibility and to support student achievement of learning goals. Throughout this process, CAST staff provided support, feedback, and guidance as needed.

Points to Consider for Future Curriculum Development

1. **The importance of intentional design.**Educators should design with intentionality, thinking about ways to provide multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement as suggested by the UDL framework from the onset. Make sure to establish clear learning goals for each lesson. This helps to ensure that the chosen supports align with the goals.
2. **The importance of careful revisions.**  When revising, educators should keep going back to the unit goals and lesson objectives to ensure that all three key UDL principles (multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement) are represented and aligned with these goals. (Note that not all UDL *guidelines* need to be incorporated in every lesson. Rather, integration of the guidelines should be strategic and purposeful, tied to specific learning goals.) One helpful technique is to highlight each time a UDL principle is incorporated, using a different color for each principle.

This type of analysis can serve as a visual reinforcement to check whether all principles are effectively represented and aligned to the learning goals, and whether UDL principles are incorporated in a balanced way throughout the unit—not just in a few lessons.

1. **Sample thinking prompts.** Develop a set of thinking prompts to consider twice: once at the outset of planning and once during review. The annotated lesson plan template (see Section 5.2) holds some examples; a longer list appears below.
* What is the language objective? What key skills and knowledge are students expected to learn and demonstrate?
* What barriers might prevent a student from accessing the lesson and/or unit? How might I minimize those barriers, using the UDL guidelines as a tool for thinking about and addressing them?
* What barriers might prevent a student from successfully reaching the learning goal? How could those barriers be addressed or minimized during the design stage?
* Are all three core principles (multiple means of representation, engagement, and action and expression) represented in the lesson and aligned with the learning goal? If not, how could they be incorporated?
* What options for perception can/does the lesson present, in line with its objective(s)? How can the lesson’s information be displayed and/or shared to ensure that it is accessible to a variety of learners?
* What options for engagement can/does the lesson present, in line with its objectives(s)? Are there opportunities for students to personalize the learning in the lesson? Is the learning meaningful and relevant to students?
* What options for action and expression can/does the lesson present, in line with its objective(s)? What opportunities for students to personalize the learning can be incorporated into the lesson? How can the lesson be meaningful and relevant to students?

**Sample Suggestions for Supporting Variability**

Carefully choose resources to support variability based on the specific learning goals of the lesson and the students in front of you. This section suggests a few ways to integrate UDL principles into common instructional activities.

1. **Offering options for presenting information** ([*UDL Principle 1: Provide Multiple Means of Representation*](http://udlguidelines.cast.org/representation)):
* When using videos, preview what students should be looking for (either through focus questions or a bulleted list of guiding questions). Make the video available to students to view on their own and have captions and/or transcripts for the video when possible. Offer students the option of pausing the video at different points to ask questions that connect to relevant lesson concepts.
* Highlight key vocabulary from text passages and videos that connect to relevant concepts and learning goals using tools that provide multiple representations (e.g., images as well as text). For example, use an online picture dictionary such as Merriam-Webster’s [*Visual Dictionary Online*](http://visual.merriam-webster.com/index.php)*,* and provide a class word wall or individual vocabulary journals that include words, images, and sample sentences using the target word.
* Highlight key take-away ideas from each lesson. For example, provide a bulleted list or [concept map graphic organizer](http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plan/graphic-organizer-concept-map).
* Post and explain the goal or objective for each lesson so students can see and understand it. When the goal is clear for students, it allows them to relate better to the content and activities in the lesson. It also provides an opportunity for self-monitoring and self-assessment.
* Make sure materials (especially teacher-created ones) are accessible to all learners. This may include captioning videos, offering text-to-speech options, images alongside text, and descriptions that can be read aloud. Note that accessibility may be necessary for some students, but can benefit many other students and promote student engagement with lesson concepts and skills. The [National Center on Accessible Educational Materials](http://aem.cast.org/creating/best-practices-educators-instructors.html#.VyFRIjArLIW) provides a comprehensive list of best practices for ensuring accessibility of educational materials.
1. **Offering options for students to demonstrate their learning** ([*UDL Principle 2: Provide Multiple Means of Action and Expression*](http://udlguidelines.cast.org/action-expression)):
* Provide opportunities for students to proactively build their own learning resources. For example, they may use a notebook, learning log, or online notebook such as [Zoho Notebook](https://www.zoho.com/notebook/). Having students set up their notebooks for the unit on the first day could be helpful. Notebooks can include background information, ideas students already have about the unit goals or lesson objectives, or notes about how students feel about the upcoming unit.
* Offer a checklist for student work each day, so they can monitor their progress toward the learning goal. For example, use [Checkli](https://www.checkli.com/) to create and post new checklists.
* Give students the option to use graphic organizers or concept maps to show their understanding, especially as the lessons progress within the larger unit.
* Offer options for students to use technology to show what they know. For example, make CAST’s [BookBuilder](http://bookbuilder.cast.org) available for reading, creating, and sharing books.
* When providing options for action and expression, be sure that the necessary components and requirements are clear so that, regardless of the option a student chooses, the method for assessment and expectations are clear.
1. **Offering options for students to engage with the content** ([*UDL Principle 3: Provide Multiple Means of Engagement*](http://udlguidelines.cast.org/engagement)):
* Make information relevant and authentic by offering examples or ways for students to relate the content to their daily experience or background.
* Offer ways for students to minimize distractions from their environment. For example, a quiet corner in the classroom or headphones can give students a chance to work in a quiet space, if that helps their learning.
* Use an exit ticket to formatively assess student progress. When needed, make changes for the following day/lesson based on what you learn from the exit ticket.
* As students work, offer process-oriented feedback toward the learning objectives for the day. Try to avoid feedback that is not specific, such as “good job” or “nice work.” Instead, consider giving specific and meaningful feedback that is tied to learning objectives, such as “effective use of adjectives.”
* Provide time for students to reflect on their own learning towards the objectives for the day or lesson. Educators can begin by [fostering a habit of reflection](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/feb09/vol66/num05/Fostering-Reflection.aspx) in their own practice, then training students on how to engage in self-reflection.

## 6.4 Attending to the Role of Critical Stance and Social Justice in ESL Curriculum Development

At the outset of the Next Generation ESL Curriculum Project, the ESL MCU Planning Committee articulated a priority, reflected in the Next Generation ESL theory of action (see Section 1.2), that next generation ESL would attend explicitly to strengthening student agency and critical stance, incorporating student identities, backgrounds, prior knowledge, and experiences. In next generation ESL, students are actively engaged in learning as critical thinkers who evaluate information and attitudes and make choices and effect change. Giving them the opportunity to gather information, question, and address real-world issues affecting themselves and their communities, next generation ESL prompts investigations of authentic critical issues as context for language development attending to deep understanding and transfer through the CEPA. In this way, a next generation ESL curriculum encompasses:

* A student-centered framework, in which student background, experience, and prior knowledge drive contingent pedagogy reflected in the curricular design.
* A sociocultural framework that acknowledges that language is built within each unique sociocultural context.
* A critical framework in which students use higher-order thinking to question existing situations and perspectives, and use knowledge and language as tools to make choices, in action, to pose solutions.

In the next generation Model Curriculum Units, these three frameworks intersect as follows:

* **The UbD enduring understandings and transfer goals provide for student agency and independent transfer of language learning to new contexts.** Unit development processes guide the curriculum toward independent transfer goals that allow for demonstration of understanding and learning in new contexts or with authentic problems students will solve using their language and critical lenses. This expectation is inherent in next generation standards and shifts aimed at CCR.

**CEPA, curricular tasks, and investigations connect to social justice and using language to take action.** CEPAs provide the opportunity to use new language to investigate and address topics in social justice or to apply learning to a real-world problem that is within students’ sphere of influence. Throughout the units, students explore language as a powerful vehicle in learning about concepts; engaging in cross-disciplinary analytic practices; and fortifying their critical lenses and agency to make choices, interact with their environment, and when necessary influence change. caution educators to maintain an awareness of the necessary balance between knowledge and action, so that insufficiently informed engagement in social justice does not serve to reproduce the very problems it seeks to disrupt (North 2008).

* **A curriculum should be student-centered and contextualized.** Students’ prior knowledge and experiences are analyzed as the starting point for curriculum development during the collaboration phase of next generation ESL, and throughout a unit as planned curriculum trajectories merge with dynamic and contingent pedagogy, informed by student learning. Throughout the next generation ESL curriculum development process, at unit and lesson levels, the teacher systematically analyzes and plans around sociocultural contexts and implications, and begins curricular design from what students can do. This culturally responsive approach recognizes students’ identities and acknowledges their languages, cultures, experiences, perspectives, and prior knowledge as assets to the learning process.
* **Multiple perspectives and multiple modalities build critical lenses.** Educators are encouraged to incorporate UDL guidelines to provide multiple means of engagement, action and expression, and representation in curricular design. The addition of multiple culturally sustaining resources and perspectives ensures that students can safely investigate, discuss, question, and understand concepts and stances. Students are poised as partners in the learning process, responsible for self-assessment and monitoring. This dynamic aspect of curricular contextualization to student lives and experience, active student ownership of learning process, and recognition of multiple perspectives helps students to understand their own identities, values, beliefs, and perspectives while building critical lenses to understand others.

In the model ESL units, many aspects of critical stance become more visible as the curricular design is implemented and enacted in instructional practice, and in both planned and spontaneous interactions between the students and the teacher. Educators are encouraged to design language curricula that engender the kinds of contexts, performance tasks, and practices that lead to student development of critical lenses, agency, and achievement.

|  |
| --- |
| **Elements of Critical Stance in One ESL MCU: Access to Clean Water** 1. **Language development integrated with grade-level standards and practice expectations**Grade-level standards (e.g., CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8, “Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text”) and academic practices (e.g., stating opinions and claims) are inherently included in the design of the unit, as context for FLGs. The context for language use supports students in reading, writing, listening, and speaking about an issue of global interest and need, as they use language to learn about the issue and pose a solution. 2. **Variety and choice**Students choose from a variety of materials to access information (e.g., video, books, abridged articles, images, charts). Choice builds agency and provides access to different perspectives.3. **Linguistic and cultural resources of students**Students' first languages are valued and tapped as resources for learning new academic language in English. Students are encouraged to use their multi-lingual resources and knowledge to learn. They refer to bilingual resources (e.g., bilingual dictionaries, cognate charts) and use first language with peers to clarify concepts and bridge concepts between first language and English. 4. **Multiple perspectives**Educators are encouraged to design units that include multiple voices and perspectives, through discussion, texts, and research aimed at informing and addressing issues of sociopolitical importance, such as access to clean water. Students should be given ample opportunity to engage with texts, images, discussion of experiences, websites, videos, and other resources focused on the context of access to clean water, all the while building toward the FLGs in the unit. 5. **Sociocultural context analysis** Sociocultural perspectives and considerations drive curricular design. Register, genres, text types, topics, tasks, relationships, social roles, and the experiences of students (e.g., potential unfamiliarity with cultural norms of a PSA, or prior experience with access to clean water) should be analyzed as part of the planning for language development. 6. **Multiple modalities, supports, and scaffolding**Students read, write, draw, listen. and discuss, using a combination of their senses and all linguistic resources that support learning. Multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression are incorporated into the unit with supports (e.g., whiteboards, turn-and-talk, help from the teacher, pointing, gestures, independent thinking time, group discussion). UDL principles and language scaffolds can help remove barriers to learning and optimize access and participation. 7. **Differentiated and student-centered**The final product of units is performance-based and differentiated with appropriate supports for the language development needs of students at different proficiency levels. With the open-ended CEPA in the form of a PSA, students have multiple ways of representing new learning and new perspectives while using language to persuade others and cause change.8. **Independent action and transfer**In next generation ESL, students are positioned to make original contributions to learning tasks. Learning tasks lead to products and performances requiring students to use complex thinking skills; apply language forms and functions within new contexts; and synthesize multiple materials, unit learning experiences, and perspectives. 9. **Student ownership**Students are consciously engaged in taking ownership of their learning; learning tasks invite them to reflect on academic concepts and use new language with real-world authentic applications. Goals and criteria for success are visible and jointly owned by teacher and student. The assessment process throughout the unit includes various forms of student self-assessment and monitoring. 10. **Questioning**Students reflect and focus upon the implications of maintaining or changing how things are done in learning or life. Students ask “why” questions and explore “what if” scenarios to understand the rationale behind concepts related to accessing clean water in the world. (In planning this aspect of the unit, developers drew on the UbD “W.H.E.R.E.T.O.” and “GRASP” approaches.) |

All educators contribute, in their respective roles, to building the identities, critical stance, and agency of ELs. Language experts in particular bring expertise related to the interconnected aspects of language, culture, and content in curricula, instruction, and assessment. Attending to student agency and building critical stance requires that all of these considerations be intentionally woven into curricular design and enacted through instructional practices in the classroom.

For more information on critical stance, see Section 7.3.2, “Additional Resources Focused on Critical Stance and Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.”

## 6.5 Dually Identified Students/ELs with Disabilities

This section is designed to provide ESL and bilingual education teachers with foundational knowledge on the assessment, instruction, and progress monitoring of English learning students with disabilities (EL/SWDs).

|  |
| --- |
| **Meet Ms. B.**I am a licensed ESL and endorsed SEI teacher in Massachusetts. While I am confident in my ability to teach ESL, I am not as confident in my knowledge of special education. Should I be familiar with the special education assessment process and tests used to measure the skills of my students with disabilities? What are my responsibilities in assessing and instructing my students identified as having disabilities? What is my role in the development and implementation of students’ individualized educational programs (IEPs)? Since I’m not always invited to IEP meetings, I’m left with the impression that English learner education (ELE) and my expertise in language acquisition aren’t essential to the creation of IEPs.Lastly, I have heard a rumor that special education “trumps” ELE programs. Is this true? *Profile based on a composite of responses from an ESE needs assessment in January 2016* |

Ms. B.’s concerns are shared by a number of other ESL and bilingual education teachers. Some ESL and bilingual education teachers are unfamiliar with the special education process and are unsure of their roles and responsibilities in meeting the needs of students identified as having disabilities.

The rumor Ms. B. mentions is incorrect: districts are responsible for providing students identified as students with disabilities and ELs with both disability-related and language assistance programs (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2015, p. 25). Furthermore, similar to their content-area and special education counterparts, ESL and bilingual education teachers are equally responsible for ensuring that the unique learning needs of EL/SWDs are met.

### 6.5.1 Special Education: A Brief Introduction

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| --- |
| ***A Moment in History***The Commonwealth of Massachusetts pioneered special education legislation with its 1972 passage of Chapter 766 (Massachusetts Advocates for Children, 2014), which served as the model for the first federal special education law, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142). Passed in 1975, PL 94-142 guaranteed:* Students with disabilities the right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE).
* Parent rights to due process.
* Parent rights to be informed in a language they could understand.
* The right to non-discriminatory assessment (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).
 |

Special education is FAPE provided in the LRE. This includes the provision of specially designed academic instruction and related services, designed to meet the unique learning needs of students. Students whose disabilities (see below) adversely affect their educational performance are eligible for special education and related services.[[7]](#footnote-7) A *disability* is defined as one or more of the following impairments:[[8]](#footnote-8)

* Autism
* Developmental delay
* Intellectual impairment
* Sensory impairment (including hearing impairment or deafness, vision Impairment or blindness, and deafness and blindness)
* Neurological impairment
* Emotional impairment
* Communication impairment
* Physical impairment
* Health impairment
* Specific learning disability

It is important to recognize that not all students with one of the abovementioned disabilities require special education. These students may require related services (e.g., transportation, developmental, corrective, and other supportive services) and instructional accommodations to access the general education curriculum (29 U.S.C. §794, Section 504; U.S. Department of Education, 2015d).

#### Laws Related to EL/SWDs

The laws related to educating EL/SWDs are designed to provide FAPE in the LRE.[[9]](#footnote-9) These include civil rights, special education, and language learning education laws (see Figure 7). ESL and bilingual education teachers must take these legal mandates into consideration when developing and implementing instructional services for EL/SWDs.



*Adapted from Serpa, 2011*

Figure 7: Laws that interact to ensure the rights of EL/SWDs

#### Civil Rights Laws

Civil rights laws and related court cases laid the foundation for both special and language learning education. These laws protect the civil rights of allstudents, including EL/SWDs. They secure protection from discrimination on the basis of national origin or exclusion from meaningful participation in education based on limited English proficiency (U.S. Department of Education, 2015a). As a result of these laws, schools are required to take needed actions to overcome any language barriers impeding equal participation in educational programs and communicate with parents in their native language or mode of communication.

**Language Learning Education Laws**

Language learning lawsrequire schools to provide English learners with instruction that is designed to help them both acquire English and achieve the same grade-level standards as students whose first language is English. Furthermore, ELs must be provided research-based instruction (U.S. Department of Education, 2015b) and assessed annually for English proficiency. Dependent on a student’s IEP, an EL/SWD may participate in annual EP assessments either with or without appropriate accommodations or by taking an alternate assessment.[[10]](#footnote-10)

**Special Education Laws**

Special education laws protect all students with disabilities, including ELs. These laws ensure access to and provision of FAPE in the LRE, as documented in a student’s IEP. Equally important, they protect parents’ rights and affect the manner in which assessments for special education and related services are carried out for EL students with or suspected of having disabilities.[[11]](#footnote-11)

### 6.5.2 The Importance of Assessment

Assessment is an essential component of the process to determine eligibility for special education and related services for students with or suspected of having a disability. It is important to recognize that ELs have different assessment needs than their monolingual peers. As well as having disabilities that affect learning of academic content, EL/SWDs need to acquire new language skills, adapt to a new culture, and master grade-level content (Serpa, 2011, p. 26). Unless it is not practicable to do so, assessment and evaluation materials need to be provided in their native language or preferred mode of communication. Doing so provides an opportunity to acquire accurate information on their performance and provides insight into what they know and can do academically, developmentally, and functionally.[[12]](#footnote-12) The information in special education assessments informs the development and implementation of instructional assessments, including the CEPAs and other evaluative tools integrated into the ESL MCUs. See Section 4.3 of this guide for more on the assessment framework (see Section 4.3) of the ESL MCU Project.

|  |
| --- |
| **Regularly Used Special Education Assessment, Tools, and Evaluation for English Learners**  |
| **Assessment**Assessment | Assessment is the process of collecting different types of information on a daily or periodical basis with a purpose. Many kinds of assessment tools and strategies are appropriate to assess eligibility for EL/SWDs. Formative assessments are those associated with ongoing instruction and progress monitoring. Summative assessments provide student progress information in relation to a particular standard and are administered annually or on particular occasions (WIDA, 2009b). A summative assessment measures student progress in relation to a specific course or standard and is administered occasionally/annually. Examples of summative assessments include MCAS and WIDA ACCESS for ELLs. |
| **Tests****Tests** | Tests are tools used to gather data. Standardized, norm-referenced tests are tools regularly used in special education assessment. They compare a student’s performance to the performance “norm” of a specific group. Many of the standardized, norm-referenced tests used to determine special education eligibility have been validated with monolingual language speakers sharing the same dominant culture and have not been validated for use with ELs.  |
| **Evaluation** | Evaluation involves analyzing and interpreting information collected from assessments to inform educational decisions. Two common frameworks for evaluating assessment data: |
| Bell curve  | **Bell curve** data are based on the performance of particular norm groups (e.g., Lisa’s performance was scored at the 50th percentile rank which means she did as well as 50% of students who took this test). |
| **JCurve** | **JCurve** data compare a subject’s performance on organized curriculum outcomes (e.g., what a student has learned and what a student needs to know in a given grade). |

*Original table provided by Maria Serpa.*

**ESL and Bilingual Education Teachers as IEP Team Members**

Federal regulations require the IEP team to consider a child’s language needs and English proficiency, along with other special factors, since these needs affect the student’s IEP. In interpreting evaluation data to determine a student’s eligibility and educational needs, the team must draw on a variety of sources including aptitude and achievement tests, parent input, teacher recommendations, linguistic needs, and social/cultural background.[[13]](#footnote-13) Therefore, it is essential that the IEP team include participants knowledgeable of the child’s language learning needs, preferably experts in second language acquisition (U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Justice, 2015, pp. 26–27). Including these professionals in eligibility and educational programming helps the team ensure that students receive the language and special education services they are entitled to.

**Distinguishing between Disability and Difference**

When determining eligibility for special education and related services of EL students with (or suspected of having) disabilities, ESL and bilingual education teachers are essential members of the IEP team. These teachers understand EL students’ language skills as well as the developmental stages of second language acquisition and the effect culture has on learning. As members of the IEP team, language acquisition professionals assist in distinguishing between language and disability in student learning behaviors related to listening, speaking, reading, writing, and mathematics (U.S. Department of Education, 2015c, pp. 6–10). When ESL and bilingual education teachers become concerned about a student’s performance in the classroom, it is essential that appropriate, research-based instructional interventions are delivered to struggling students, for students with or without disabilities.

Effective, research-based interventions, like those recommended in the [Massachusetts Tiered System of Support](http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfss/presentations-pubs/) (MTSS), are designed to give students targeted academic and behavioral supports in an encouraging learning environment. As a component of MTSS, Response to Intervention (RTI) is a multi-tiered method that increases in intensity based on individual student need. RTI consists of high-quality instruction, progress monitoring, tiered instruction, and parent involvement (RTI Action Network, n.d.). When developing interventions, ESL and bilingual educators must consider language acquisition level, culture and acculturation, and prior knowledge.

### 6.5.3 Meeting the Learning Needs of EL/SWDs

EL/SWDs have a unique set of learning needs, requiring specially designed language learning instruction and related services. For these students, the design of instruction and instructional activities should support access to general education curriculum content standards as well as language learning programs. Depending on individual need, this may include the implementation of specific instructional strategies and instructional accommodations and/or modifications (Serpa, 1996, 2011). When the students are identified as EL/SWDs, special education and related services are applied to ELE programs.

**Special Education Services**

To qualify as FAPE, public education must come at no cost to the student or family. Also included: evaluation and placement procedures designed to prevent misclassification and inappropriate placement, periodic reevaluation for special education and related services, and due process procedures for parents and guardians to receive required notices. Under FAPE, parents have the right to review student records and make challenges to evaluation, identification, and placement decisions.[[14]](#footnote-14) The determination of the LRE for students is based on individual learning needs and refers to the educational environment in which students with disabilities are educated with their non-disabled peers, to the maximum extent appropriate.[[15]](#footnote-15)

**The IEP: The Building Block of Educational Programming**

A student’s IEP serves as the basis for educational programming. The IEP is a contract, detailing the services a school will provide to a student. The learning needs of EL/SWDs (including those related to disability, academics, language, culture, and behavior, guided by FAPE and LRE requirements) are documented in the IEP of each student.

Information in a student’s IEP includes strengths, evaluation summaries, present levels of educational performance, the effect of disabilities on academic progress, specially designed instruction and modifications, measurable annual goals, service delivery options, schedule modifications, and information related to state and district-wide assessment (ESE, 2001, p. 19). IEPs include information on how students will participate in the general education setting, particularly how students with disabilities will participate in ESL and bilingual education. For this reason, ESL teachers and other language learning educators must access the EL student’s IEP and be involved with providing specially designed language learning and academic content instruction.

### 6.5.4 EL/SWD Information Cards

The following pages contain information on two subjects:

* The eligibility process for EL/SWDs.
* The RTI method’s tiered system of support.

**EL/SWD Information Card 1
Eligibility Process for Special Education: SWDs and EL/SWDs**



*Source: Serpa & Rinaldi (2015), based on Serpa (2011); Kingner & Eppolito (2014)*

**EL/SWD Information Card 2
Tiered System of Support: RTI Considerations for English Learners**

|  |
| --- |
| **Tiered Instruction** |
| **Tier 1**1. Has the student been provided with adequate instruction in reading, writing, and math?
2. Is the core curriculum for EL students reflective of academic standards specific to bilingual education and ESL programs? (Example: Are all items understandable, based on the target student’s ELP levels?)
3. Is the core instruction of high quality and delivered with fidelity (including intensity and duration)?
4. Is there a difference in the student’s performance by subject area?
5. Is the universal screening and progress monitoring process culturally responsive for the ELs?

**Tiers 2 and 3**1. Is the instruction/intervention culturally, linguistically, and developmentally appropriate?
2. Does the intervention include explicit academic intervention in the area(s) where the student is demonstrating learning difficulty?
3. Is there evidence that interventions were implemented with high fidelity as intended?
4. Do Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions supplement core instruction (not replace it)?
5. Were interventions delivered with higher intensity if the student did not demonstrate sufficient progress? (Examples: increase in number of days and/or amount of time; small group to one-on-one instruction.)
 |
| **Progress Monitoring** |
| 1. Does student progress monitoring data reflect a comparison to age- and grade-level state norms that represent the school population and comparison to a student or “true peer” having been in the same or similar educational setting; sharing the same native language; and having a similar culture?
2. Is there evidence that a student’s achievement (e.g., basic skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking) differs significantly from grade-level standards from that of a true peer?
3. Has the student failed to develop expected native language and English language skills reasonable for his/her developmental and background experiences despite receiving high-quality instruction, including ESL supports as part of the general education?
 |
| **Parent Involvement**  |
| 1. Is the student’s parent/legal guardian informed of the student receiving preventive, tiered intervention(s) in addition to ESL services as part of the school’s RTI/MTSS model (in a language or preferred method of communication they can understand)?
2. Have cultural values and beliefs been considered in planning?
3. Do parents/guardians understand how their child will continue to receive the tiered, ESL, and specially designed instruction if eligible for special education services?
4. Is there a cultural liaison who can link the school and community contexts and parental rights for the parents?
 |

*Sources: August & Shanahan (2006); Rinaldi (2015); Rinaldi, Ortiz, & Gamm (2014); U.S Department of Education (2015c)*

## 6.6 Supporting Professional Learning and Collaboration in the NG ESL MCUs

The language development of ELs is the responsibility of both ESL and other content teachers. Program coherence and cross-disciplinary collaboration are crucial for success in any of our programs. ESL and other content teachers need support, strategies, [professional development](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/profdev.html), and mechanisms in place to be able to work collaboratively. Teachers developing Next Generation ESL MCUs were given several tools (such as the Collaboration Tool (see Section 3.2) and related processes and protocols) and time to help them collaborate and engage in guided instructional conversations. These conversations supported the teachers as they planned instruction to cultivate their ELs’ higher-order thinking skills and develop their ability to process and produce increasingly complex language. They resembled the type of discussions promoted in PLCs.

While there is no single, common definition of a PLC, a literature review by Stoll et al. (2006) contends that, generally speaking, a PLC is a professional learning model in which groups of educators meet routinely to share and critically analyze their professional practices in a manner that is reflective, learning-centered, and growth-oriented. Ultimately, the purpose is to support student learning and achievement by enhancing or improving teacher practices related to curriculum, instruction, assessment, and analysis of student work (see Section 5.3.3) (Hord, 1997).

In their research, Stoll et al. (2006) and Tam (2015) suggest that PLCs have the potential to positively impact teachers and students in numerous ways when they provide, and sustain a collaborative environment dedicated to analyzing teacher practices. Positive outcomes for teachers include enhanced perceptions of self-efficacy as well as a greater willingness to try new and innovative practices. Benefits for students that may result from teachers’ improved practice include increases in motivation, achievement, and overall performance in school.

1. * 1. **Elements of Effective PLCs**

Establishing productive PLCs is not always easy. Districts and schools often struggle to find the time for teachers to routinely meet and work together. In “[Finding Time for Collaboration](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept93/vol51/num01/Finding-Time-for-Collaboration.aspx),” Raywid (1993) describes how schools across the country have met the challenge of finding time to collaborate. (She notes that districts and schools also wrestle with how to support PLCs to ensure that they effectively support teacher and student learning.)

While there is no specific recipe for a productive PLC, there appear to be some essential ingredients that school leaders should work to put into the mix. The following factors contribute to well-run PLCs, which can in turn make them worth the effort for all involved:

* **Focus on improving professional practice.**PLCs are not the time to plan field trips or schedule parent conferences. If a PLC is to have a positive and substantive impact on teacher and student learning, teachers’ collaborative time must focus squarely on sharing and receiving feedback and ideas that relate to curriculum, instruction, and assessment.
* **Consistent membership.** Members of a PLC must feel comfortable sharing artifacts of their professional practice with each other. As Hord (1997) points out, it can take time for teachers to develop this mutual trust. Productive PLCs tend to have consistent membership, enabling participants to become familiar and comfortable working with each other.
* **Established norms.** Clear norms make any meeting more efficient. Productive PLCs should also have norms that support rich, meaningful conversations (e.g., Garmston & Wellman, 2013). Examples of useful norms include *presuming positive intentions*, *being fully present*, and *putting ideas on the table*. Well-run PLCs frequently review norms at the beginning of each meeting, use them to get back on track when some participants might be heading off on a tangent, and refer to them again to debrief and reflect on their process at the end of each conversation.
* **Routine meeting time.** If a PLC does not meet often or routinely enough, it will be difficult for participants to build the required trust and sense of community. Many schools that have productive PLCs provide time for teachers to get together at least once or twice a month. Some even have teachers meet once or twice a week. And meetings need to be long enough that members have adequate time to review teacher and student artifacts and to engage in a conversation that is rich enough to influence changes in teacher practice. This suggests that PLC meetings need to be at least 60 minutes long; however, 90 minutes is ideal.
* **Structured conversations.**Often overlooked in the implementation of a PLC is the value of using tools and protocols to help focus conversations on sharing and analyzing teacher practice. Without this focus, PLCs tend to spend more time on sharing work and less time analyzing and discussing feedback. Tools and protocols also help PLCs to operate as efficiently as possible, something that is especially important given the difficulty of making time for PLCs.
* **Other typical characteristics of a productive, efficient PLC:**
* Determines agenda in advance of the PLC meeting.
* Prepares necessary materials in advance.
* Establishes roles and reviews norms at the beginning of the meeting.
* Sets purpose or objective of the meeting at the outset.
* Uses a structured process or protocol to guide the discussion.
* Identifies examples of effective practice during the discussion.
* Makes time to provide thoughtful feedback.
* Summarizes the learning and positive take-aways.
* Reflects on the process.

### 6.6.2 Five Steps to Effective PLCs

Fostering a well-run PLC takes deliberate preparation and planning. Below are five steps—based largely on the work of Hord (1997) and Stoll et al. (2006)—that school and district leaders can take to create and implement high-functioning PLCs:

1. **Communicate the PLC’s purpose.** For any PLC to have a positive impact on teacher and student learning, participants must have a shared understanding of the PLC’s purpose, particularly the importance of focusing on learning for both teachers and students. Hord (1997) describes this as establishing shared values and a common vision. One way of getting PLC members on the same page is for a school leader to collaborate with teachers to clearly define, and document in writing, the vision and purpose of the proposed PLC.
2. **Establish a routine time to meet.** As noted above, PLCs need to meet often enough that members can develop mutual trust and for long enough periods for members to engage in substantive conversations about their professional practices. Schools can be very creative in how they find this time. For example, some leaders make sure the daily schedule creates time for PLCs to meet during the school day. Other leaders provide stipends for teachers to meet before or after school. Some principals dedicate existing staff or department meeting time to PLC work. Another strategy some districts have used is to build late starts or early releases into the school calendar to free up time when all teachers can meet when students are not at school.
3. **Develop a resource bank of meeting protocols.**As also noted earlier, to support practice-centered discussions, productive PLCs tend to use protocols or structured processes to guide the conversations and analysis of artifacts of teacher practice. Well-written protocols typically provide time for teachers to clarify the purpose of the meeting, review norms, establish roles, become familiar with any artifacts, analyze and offer feedback, as well as reflect and debrief on the success of the discussion. Below are a few organizations and websites with pre-established protocols and other tools to support PLCs:
* [Center for Collaborative Education](http://www.cce.org)
* [School Reform Initiative](http://www.schoolreforminitiative.org)
* [National School Reform Faculty](http://www.nsrfharmony.org)
1. **Provide facilitator support.**A well-run PLCs usually has a facilitator who is comfortable leading his or her group. To develop a cadre of effective facilitators, administrators should provide opportunities for educators to receive training in facilitation skills. School leaders should also provide opportunities for PLC facilitators to meet routinely with each other to share resources and provide mutual support.
2. **Provide visible leadership and support.** School leaders can also participate themselves, at least periodically, and to provide ongoing support as needs and questions arise. In many schools, leaders find it difficult to visit PLCs regularly. Without regular participation from leaders, though, it is easy for PLCs to devolve into the types of meetings that will not influence teacher practice in positive ways (e.g. Sims & Penny, 2014).

### 6.6.3 Using PLCs and Protocols to Support Standards-Driven Learning[[16]](#footnote-16)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Elements** |  |  |
| **Capacity to Engage in PLCs** | **Not Begun** | **Being Planned** | **In Progress** | **Well-Established** |
| A clear and common vision for PLCs  |  |  |  |  |
| Routine time for collaborative PLC work  |  |  |  |  |
| Clear, institutional guidelines that define how collaborative work time is to be used to support PLCs |  |  |  |  |
| A set of PLC tools and resources (protocols, guides, models, and examples) teachers can use to support PLC work |  |  |  |  |
| Well-trained facilitators to lead PLCs in collaborative groups |  |  |  |  |

### 6.6.4 Collaborative Protocols: Self-Assessment of PLC Practices[[17]](#footnote-17)

**Overview**

PLCs are one of the most effective methods of professional development that have direct impact on student learning and achievement. In order to make the most of limited time, it is important for the PLCs to be efficient. In order to be efficient, successful PLCs routinely engage in the practices listed below. This tool is designed as a self-assessment, a prompt for reflection within a PLC.

**Directions**

1. Pass the “Self-Assessment” sheet out to each member of the PLC.
2. Have each person complete the sheet.
3. After everyone has responded, compare results.
4. Based on the responses, discuss the following questions as a group.
	* What are the relative strengths of the PLC?
	* Where are potential areas of growth?
	* What are one or two practices the PLC can target for improvement?
	* What will the PLC do to improve in these areas?
5. After discussing the questions, make and record a plan.

**Self-Assessment**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Consider past practice in your PLC. In general, how often does it effectively engage in each of the following practices?** | Always | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never |
| Pre-establishes agenda in advance of the PLC meeting. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Prepares necessary materials in advance. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Establishes roles and reviews norms at the beginning of the meeting. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Sets purpose or objective at the outset. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Identifies and uses a process or protocol to structure the conversation and analysis. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Deliberately identifies examples of effective practice. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Makes time to provide thoughtful feedback. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Summarizes the learning and positive take-aways. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Reflects on the process used during the meeting. |  |  |  |  |  |

Notes



This document was prepared by the
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Jeffrey C. Riley

Commissioner

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Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148-4906

Phone 781-338-3000 TTY: N.E.T. Relay 800-439-2370



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1. Note, in particular, Appendix II (p. 123) in the recently released [Massachusetts Science and Technology/Engineering Frameworks](http://www.doe.mass.edu/stem/review.html), [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As required in [603 CMR 7.06](http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr7.html?section=06): “Subject Matter Knowledge Requirements for Teachers.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Adapted with permissions granted by Student Achievement Partners, Achieve the Core Creative Commons License. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See NGA Center & CCSSO, 2012*, Supplemental Information for Appendix A*, p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. From Shanahan’s blog on “Further Explanation of Teaching Students with Challenging Text”: <http://www.readingrockets.org/blogs/shanahan-literacy/further-explanation-teaching-students-challenging-text>. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For more information, see Bunch, Walqui, & Pearson, 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 34 CFR §300.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See ESE’s “[Massachusetts Education Laws and Regulations](http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr28.html?section=02)” page for a complete list of impairment definitions. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 34 CFR §300.114; 34 CFR §300.17. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For more information on annual English proficiency and content standard testing, refer to ESE (2015f). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. 34 CFR §300.304; 34 CFR §300.322(e); 34 CFR §300.9; 34 CFR §300.503(c)(1)(ii); 34 CFR 300.612(a)(1). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 34 CFR §300.304(c)(1). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. 34 CFR §300.306(b)(1)(iii); 34 CFR §300.306(c)(1)(i). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. 34 CFR §300.501. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. 34 CFR §300.55. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Developed by WestEd. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Developed by WestEd. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)