

# The Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Communication and Literacy Skills (CLS2) Framework

## Acknowledgments

Coming Soon!

## Introduction

In September 2023, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) released an [Educational Vision](#) outlining the goals of public education in Massachusetts. In the Learning Experience section of the vision, it states:

“All students in Massachusetts, particularly students from historically underserved groups and communities, will have equitable opportunities to excel in all content areas across all grades. Culturally and linguistically sustaining classroom and school practices will support students to thrive by creating affirming environments where students have a sense of belonging, engage in deeper learning, and are held to high expectations with targeted support.”

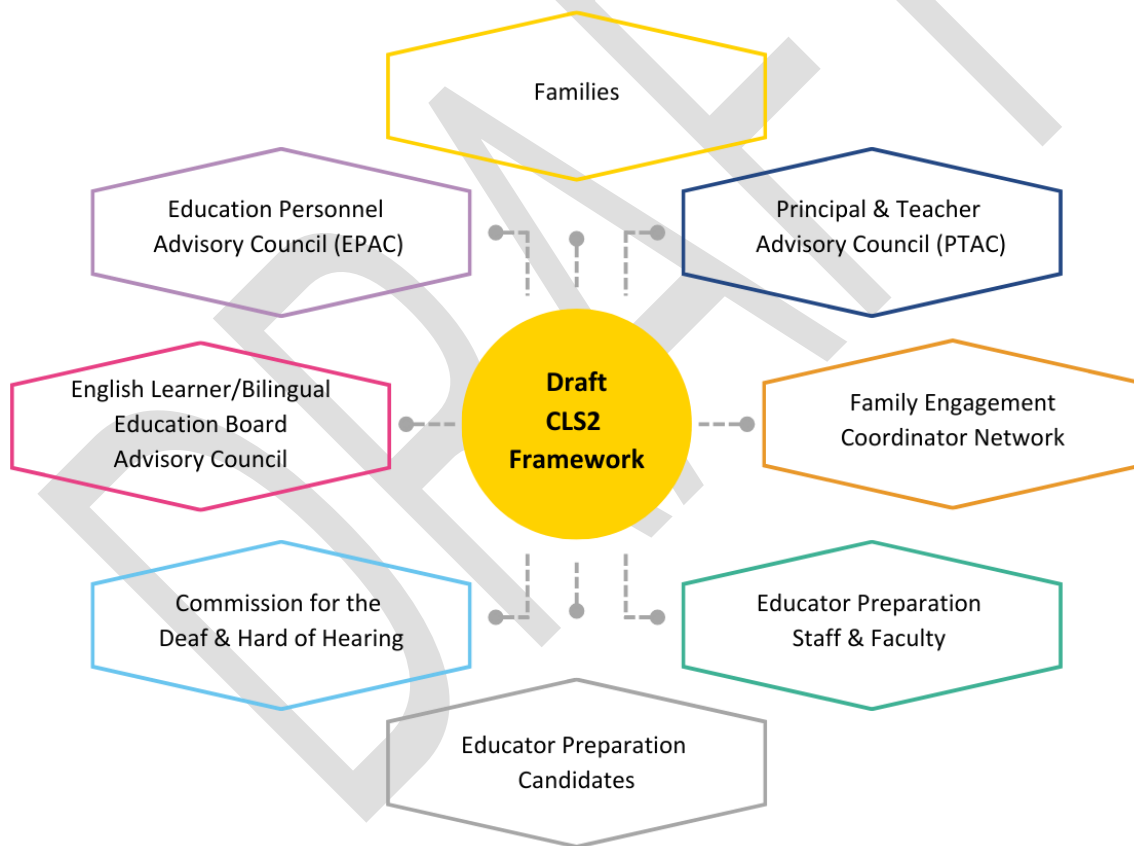
As the vision articulates, it is imperative that educators understand and are prepared to be skillful in culturally and linguistically sustaining classroom and school practices to support students across Massachusetts. In alignment with this vision, DESE is revising or developing a number of resources to ensure that educators are well-supported to understand and demonstrate these practices. One such resource is the newly developed standalone **Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Communication and Literacy Skills (CLS2) Framework** that will guide the redevelopment of the Communication and Literacy Skills (CLST) Massachusetts Test for Educator Licensure (MTEL).

State law on educator licensure requires educators to pass “a test established by the board which shall consist of two parts: (A) a writing section which shall demonstrate the communication and literacy skills necessary for effective instruction and improved communication between school and parents...” ([Mass. Gen. Laws, ch.71, § 38G](#)). Since the requirement for the MTEL was established, the CLST MTEL has served as the mechanism for educators to demonstrate that they have the communication and literacy skills outlined in statute.

Historically, the framework guiding the CLST MTEL has been the English Language Arts and Literacy framework, which means that the test focuses on reading and writing literacy skills. While research has found that MTEL scores are positive and statistically significant predictors of teachers’ in-service performance ratings and contributions to student test score (i.e., value

added) once they enter the workforce, pass rate gaps persist based on racial demographics and the primary language of test takers (Cowan et al., 2020). In addition, the current limited focus on reading and writing on the CLST MTEL does not realize the potential for and importance of including culturally and linguistically sustaining communication skills educators need to communicate well with students and families. The new CLS2 Framework is still grounded in essential communication and literacy skills educators need for effective instruction and also includes the culturally and linguistically sustaining communication skills necessary to build district and school culture and a sense of student belonging.

Developed in partnership with Throughline Learning, the Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Communication and Literacy Skills (CLS2) Framework includes input and feedback from educators and other stakeholders across Massachusetts, and is aligned to multiple DESE resources. The image below shows the groups DESE engaged in the development of the CLS2 Framework.



## What is the CLS2 Framework?

The CLS2 Framework represents the communication and literacy skills that pre-Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade academically licensed educators need for effective instruction and improved communication between school and parents, as required by state law, including culturally and linguistically sustaining communication skills and foundational literacy skills in alignment with DESE’s Educational Vision.



This framework signals what is important with respect to culturally and linguistically sustaining communication and literacy skills, and will inform the development of the CLST MTEL test. The test that will be designed from this framework will be accessible to educator candidates at the earliest stages of entry into the education workforce. As such, neither the CLS2 Framework, nor the CLST MTEL include pedagogical skills, as those are developed through other aspects of a candidate’s preparation process and throughout their career.

The CLS2 Framework is one of a number of resources that have been developed by DESE to support the implementation of culturally and linguistically sustaining practices; more are in development. Licensed educators interested in learning more about how to expand their culturally and linguistically sustaining practices and skills can review the Related Resources.

### Related Resources

[Educational Vision](#)

[Supporting Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Practices](#)

[Strengthening Partnerships: A Framework for Prenatal through Young Adulthood Family Engagement in Massachusetts](#)

[Standards of Effective Practice](#)

[The Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Framework](#)

[Principal Induction and Mentoring](#)

[Culturally Responsive Teaching Video Library](#)

[Culturally Responsive Look-Fors](#)

## How to Engage with the Framework

The CLS2 Framework is divided into four domains with corresponding competencies. The four domains are:

1. Communicating with Students
2. Communicating with Families and Caregivers
3. Communicating with Colleagues and External Stakeholders
4. Literacy

Several competencies are repeated purposefully and thematically across domains to ensure that educators consider them in different contexts.

As previously noted, the CLS2 Framework codifies the culturally and linguistically sustaining communication and literacy skills necessary for educators. However, this framework is part of a continuum of opportunities to demonstrate preparedness as illustrated below.

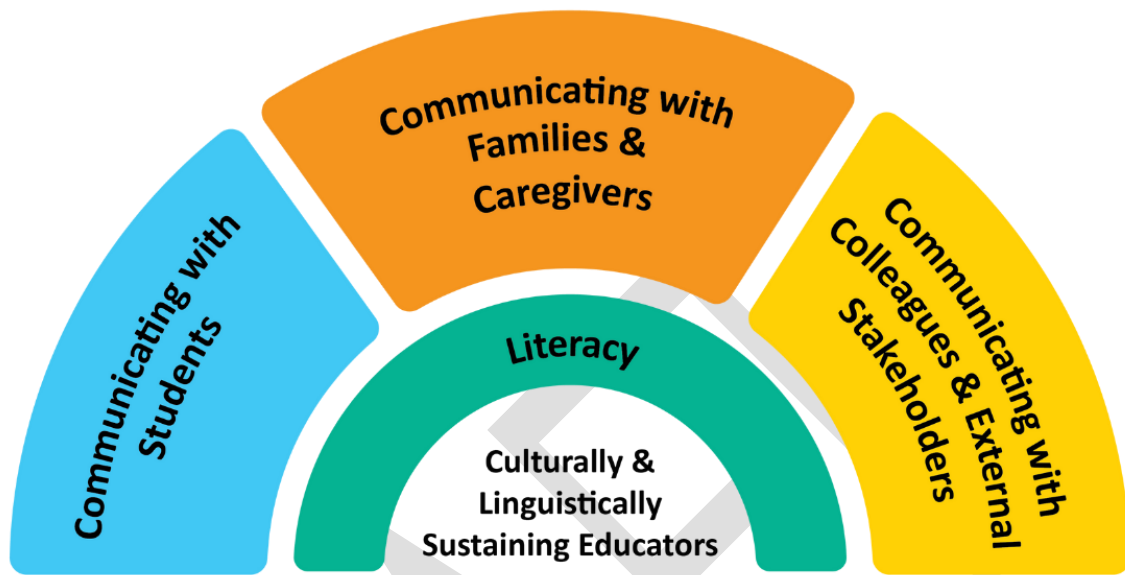
Basic	Functional	Fluent	Expert
Knows the essential communication & literacy skills	Demonstrates understanding of essential culturally & linguistically sustaining communication & literacy skills in a range of educational contexts	Applies the culturally & linguistically sustaining communication & literacy skills in a range of educational contexts	Consistently applies culturally & linguistically sustaining communication & literacy skills across all educational contexts
<b>PK12 Expectations:</b> Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)	<b>Provisional Licensure:</b> Communication and Literacy Skills Massachusetts Test for Educator Licensure (MTEL)	<b>Initial Licensure:</b> Teachers: Pre-Practicum Gateways and Candidate Assessment of Performance (CAP)  Other School & District Personnel: Initial Licensure Requirements	<b>Professional Licensure and/or Supervisor/Director Roles</b>

Since the CLS2 Framework represents a functional level of knowledge, we use terms like “**understandings**” rather than “**demonstrations**” when referring to culturally and linguistically sustaining communication skills. Candidates may not yet be able to or have not had the opportunity to demonstrate fluency in culturally and linguistically sustaining communication; in fact, they may still need practice with these skills. However, they should still be able to understand and recognize critical culturally and linguistically sustaining communication skills, while also demonstrating the necessary literacy skills to support that communication.

In addition to the domains and competencies, the CLS2 Framework includes a **Glossary** of key terms and **References**. The glossary terms are meant to provide more information about the intended meanings of terms that may have specific meanings when used in an educational setting, with some examples and scenarios included to support understanding.

The final CLS2 Framework will be provided on the DESE website so that candidates are able to use it to prepare for the revised CLST MTEL when it is eventually released.

# The Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Communication and Literacy Skills (CLS2) Framework



## Domains

Domain 1: Communicating with Students

Domain 2: Communicating with Families and Caregivers

Domain 3: Communicating with Colleagues and External Stakeholders

Domain 4: Literacy

## Domain 1: Communicating with Students

Educators understand the following competencies:

- 1.1 Communicating the **assets\*** of students and families in all spaces
- 1.2 Communicating **high expectations** for and a **growth mindset** about all students
- 1.3 Communicating that students are **safe and respected** through language, tone, and demeanor
- 1.4 Communicating one's own enthusiasm for learning to support student **engagement** and connection to their cultures, values, and interests
- 1.5 Seeking and sharing **asset-based\***, specific, and supportive feedback with students for improvement
- 1.6 Leveraging **active listening\***, **empathy, and inquiry** to work through various situations that could impact relationships
- 1.7 **Advocating** for students, including through difficult conversations, in order to **challenge inequitable practices\*** and promote a **healthy, safe, and just** academic environment for all
- 1.8 **Clear, accessible** communication across various formats and modalities with attention to developmental, cultural, and linguistic considerations and **multiple ways of sharing knowledge**
- 1.9 Acknowledging the ways in which idioms, proverbs, and colloquialisms communicate culture explicitly/implicitly and supporting students to understand and communicate **intended meanings**
- 1.10 Using and teaching relevant and empowering **academic language\*** and **content-specific language\*** while honoring and integrating **diverse linguistic expressions\***

\*See glossary for key term and intended meaning

## Domain 2: Communicating with Families and Caregivers

Educators understand the following competencies:

- 2.1 Communicating the **assets\*** of students and families in all spaces
- 2.2 Communicating **high expectations** for and a **growth mindset** about all students
- 2.3 **Welcoming and empowering** families as important **decision makers** in the school community
- 2.4 **Building authentic relationships\*** with families grounded in an understanding of family preferences and priorities
- 2.5 Seeking family **feedback** to ensure **equitable learning** conditions for all students
- 2.6 Leveraging **active listening\***, **empathy**, and **inquiry** to nurture relationships
- 2.7 **Advocating** for families/caregivers, including through difficult conversations, in order to **challenge inequitable practices\*** and promote a **healthy, safe, and just** academic environment for all
- 2.8 Establishing **clear, family-friendly, proactive, and two-way\*** communication across various formats with attention to **accessibility, honoring linguistic preferences, and demonstrating responsiveness** to needs and concerns
- 2.9 Sharing students' **strengths and needs** with families in accessible ways across various formats
- 2.10 Communicating how families can **support** their children's **social-emotional and/or academic development** in accessible ways that are aligned to families' goals for their children



## Domain 3: Communicating with Colleagues and External Stakeholders

Educators understand the following competencies:

- 3.1 Communicating the **assets\*** of students and families in all spaces
- 3.2 Communicating **high expectations** for and a **growth mindset** about all students
- 3.3 Communicating and **collaborating** with colleagues by sharing responsibility for supporting student learning, **planning** effectively, and building on one another's **expertise**
- 3.4 **Using constructive, solutions-oriented language** that builds healthy school climate and a culture of improvement
- 3.5 Communicating **opportunities** and **challenges** through an **asset-based\*** lens
- 3.6 Communicating **student progress** across various formats in accessible ways with all relevant **stakeholders\***
- 3.7 **Advocating** for students and families/caregivers, including through difficult conversations, in order to **challenge inequitable practices\*** and promote a **healthy, safe, and just** academic environment for all

## Domain 4: Literacy

### Foundational Literacy Skills

The following foundational English language literacy skills related to interpreting, understanding, analyzing, and evaluating information are in service of the communication competencies outlined in the previous three domains. Across formats, educators can demonstrate their ability to:

- 4.1 Understand, summarize, and communicate **main ideas/themes and details**
- 4.2 **Cite evidence** and make **logical inferences**
- 4.3 Demonstrate **critical reasoning skills** by identifying assumptions within arguments, differentiating between facts and opinions, and identifying a writer's objectivity or **bias**
- 4.4 Identify **points of view**, explain various perspectives, and make **asset-based\* interpretations**
- 4.5 **Compare and contrast** ideas across multiple sources
- 4.6 Effectively **interpret\* meaning** and **tone** from a variety of culturally and linguistically diverse sources
- 4.7 Explain how choices around language shape **meaning, tone, and interpretation\***, especially as it relates to potential **misunderstandings** based on the linguistic and/or cultural backgrounds of the audience
- 4.8 **Identify and evaluate arguments**
- 4.9 **Analyze and integrate information**

### Literacy Skills for Communication

Educators can demonstrate these literacy skills in service of communication with all stakeholders:

- 4.10 **Select effective formats of communication** for accessibility and relationship management
- 4.11 Communicate **main ideas and details** clearly across various formats with considerations made to accessibility
- 4.12 Construct and communicate an **argument and evidence** in an accessible way across various formats
- 4.13 Convey and **organize complex ideas** clearly and **concisely\***
- 4.14 **Adapt communication** based on audience and revise to prevent misinterpretations

#### 4.15 Construct and revise language for (warm, collaborative, curious) tone

### Glossary

This glossary serves to clarify the intended meaning of terms that are used in the framework in order to facilitate better understanding of the competencies. In particular cases, where deemed necessary, scenarios are also included to illustrate examples of the concepts referenced.

#### Academic Language vs. Content-Specific Language<sup>2, 6, 7, 27</sup>

##### Academic Language

Academic language refers to interdisciplinary language that empowers students to understand and use words and phrases that support access to grade-level content. This includes language structures, learning verbs (i.e., analyzing or evaluating), etc. This does not mean academic jargon that does not contribute to students' academic success. This also does not discount cultural expressions. Students should be able to understand and leverage language with intentionality in ways that honor diverse linguistic expressions. Teaching academic language is supportive to all students and, when scaffolded, supports students to carry the cognitive load of content more effectively.

For example:

- Supporting students to understand their task. What does it mean to explain versus to analyze?
- Supporting students to understand and use the language of critical thinking skills (i.e., reasoning, argumentation, etc.)

##### Content Specific Language

Educators who use content-specific (or discipline-specific) language support students to understand vocabulary relevant to particular disciplines, with the intention of empowering them to leverage language and concepts in meaningful and relevant ways.

For example:

- Math: using language of “functions” in a way that supports students to understand the relevance and meaningful applications of the term (as opposed to mere algorithmic language that instructs students to “just solve for y”, for example)
- Health: when a student complains of a “tummy ache,” a nurse or health teacher may support the student to understand specifically what might be hurting by debriefing the experience using language that empowers the student to use more precise vocabulary (consider the impact of interactions with health systems over a person's lifetime)

### **Scenario: Academic Language and Content-Specific Language**

A student in a math class is learning about linear equations. The student is given an equation in slope-intercept form and asked to explain in a complete sentence what a value represents, using the context of a word problem involving babysitting with a starting fee of \$10, plus \$5/hour. The student uses colloquial phrases to explain the context around the starting fee and correctly uses the term “y-intercept”.

The teacher affirms the student’s understanding of the context (thereby affirming their linguistic expressions) as well as the student’s correct use of the math term (content-specific language). As a follow up, the teacher asks the student to compare two rates and make an argument for which rate would earn the babysitter more money for five hours of work. The student again includes some colloquial language in their answer and correctly uses content-specific language as well as academic language to compare the two equations, evaluate, and make an argument. The teacher, once again, affirms three aspects of the student’s answer (along with their habits of success): the student’s understanding of the context in a way that is clearly relevant to their experiences, the student’s use of content-specific language in their explanation, and the student’s use of academic language in the explanation of their argument for which rate will earn the babysitter the most money.

### **Active Listening**

Active listening refers to listening to understand with empathy and inquiry. This could look like paying attention without interrupting, restating or reflecting back what one heard or inferred, and asking questions for deeper understanding.

### **Assets or Asset-Based<sup>25</sup>**

Django Paris and H. Samy Alim describe the importance of asset-based approaches to ensure students’ cultural and linguistic traditions are honored and sustained in school spaces. In our communication with all stakeholders, it is important that we honor and build on assets to make schooling experiences more relevant, meaningful, and effective and to transform schools into examples of equitable and inclusive environments where all cultures are honored and affirmed. Paris and Alim reference three kinds of approaches: deficit, difference, and asset-based. “Deficit approaches” intend to replace students’ cultural practices with “superior” ones. “Difference approaches” focus on these dominant practices without considering cultural practices because they view home practices as different from those needed for teaching and learning. Asset-based approaches honor and sustain cultural practices while providing access to dominant practices.

### **Scenario: Asset-Based Approach**

As an example of an asset-based approach, consider a student analyzing literature and discussing characterization during a class discussion. Suppose this student connects their analysis of the character to relevant examples from the student's own cultural reference points. The student's analysis is nuanced and reflects a deep understanding of the text. The teacher honors the examples the student draws from, asks questions to explore the examples in greater depth, and supports the student to extend their analysis, drawing on the student's examples. The teacher then helps the student to connect their explanations to relevant vocabulary that explain these concepts. Next, the teacher supports the student to leverage this vocabulary to further extend their analysis, now connecting the thinking the student produced to relevant terminology that will support them in their writing.

### **Authentic Relationships**

Authentic relationships are those in which we can show up as ourselves, we allow others to show up as themselves, and we see, acknowledge, affirm, and honor one another's identities and values. In this type of relationship, we truly see and honor humanity in one another and we build our relationship from this place of holistic regard.

### **Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Pedagogy<sup>25</sup>**

Django Paris and H. Samy Alim describe culturally sustaining pedagogy as a way of teaching that honors and nurtures students' and communities' cultural ways of being. This approach leverages existing schema and funds of knowledge to facilitate learning as well as family/community engagement. Culturally sustaining approaches intentionally facilitate space for identities and traditions to evolve in order to build equity and inclusivity in policies and practices across a system.

### **Concise<sup>4</sup>**

While different cultures have different ways of expressing ideas, when sharing written communication with families, it is helpful to use bullet points, headings, and other strategies for brevity and clarity.

### **Diverse Linguistic Expressions**

Diverse linguistic expressions, or multilingualism, are an assets that should be honored as part of nurturing a culture of belonging that can be built upon to make learning more relevant and meaningful.

### **Growth Mindset**

A growth mindset refers to the belief that one's ability and competence grows with one's effort. By communicating a growth mindset to and about students, adults are communicating their belief that students can and will grow their abilities.

### **Inequitable Practices**

Systemic inequities translate into our schools in various ways, perpetuating harm for everyone, particularly communities that have been historically oppressed. Equitable practices are those that ensure that every student gets what they need, whereas inequitable practices are those that perpetuate gaps in access, experiences, and outcomes.

### **Interpret**

Interpretation in this framework refers to understanding the linguistic meaning of a word or phrase, the intended meaning or connotation as expressed, and the reference points that may be relevant to fully understanding the word/phrase.

### **Stakeholder**

This refers to any individual who is invested in functions of the school community. This includes but is not limited to: families, members of community organizations, students' social workers, etc. The parameters and specifics of communicating with external stakeholders (members not employed within the school) should be defined within school/district policy.

### **Two-Way Communication<sup>11</sup>**

When communicating with families, it is important to ensure that dialogue goes in both directions. Partnerships should be collaborative and interactive. Families have deep funds of knowledge and they should be honored as experts, leaders, and supporters of their children's learning.

### **Various Formats**

It is important for educators to develop comfort communicating across various formats based on the accessibility considerations and preferences of the audience. This includes considerations regarding different abilities, cultural and linguistic preferences; as well as facilitating efficiency and ease. Families may prefer written or oral communication, WhatsApp or SMS, etc. For example, when attending to accessibility needs for families who are deaf or hard of hearing, communication should be based on family preferences and may include sending video messages by phone or uploading to Google Classroom with American Sign Language interpretation, or it might include email or text messaging (consider preferences for

WhatsApp versus SMS).

### **Scenario: Various Formats**

Suppose a school nurse wants to send communication to all families to inform them about an information session at the school. Rather than just sending out bulk email to the school list, the nurse builds a communication plan, gathering from educators and administrators insights on families' needs in order to ensure a communication system with the fewest barriers for families. The school nurse incorporates the following considerations:

1. Recognizing different comfort levels with technology, the nurse sends hard copies in student backpacks to bring home in addition to leveraging the school's communication app (i.e., Talking Points, Remind, etc.), Whatsapp/text messages, email, etc. All communication is shared in the languages families prefer.
2. The nurse uses their learnings about family preferences to determine the best dates/time for families to attend the session, along with information about what families need to be able to attend comfortably.
3. Recognizing that emails are best for longer communication that is not time sensitive, the nurse sends emails ahead of the event, but sends texts when quick responses are necessary (i.e., to make it easy to RSVP, to remind families on the day of the event, and to reach out around particular differentiated needs).
4. The nurse ensures that all communication is concise, easy to skim, and includes clear to-dos.
5. On the day of the event, the nurse has interpretation services available for families.
6. At the event, the nurse collects feedback (formally and/or informally) from attendees regarding how communication went.
7. The nurse follows up with family members in their preferred communication formats, differentiating for families who were able to attend and those who were not. If there are recordings of relevant information available in multiple languages, the nurse shares those to benefit all families.

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