



Improving Academic Competencies of English Language Learners through Educator Professional Development

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NDE Standards: 2) Continuous School Improvement and 4) Culture for Learning



ACTION PLAN

The first part of the action plan will be to collect demographic data from English language learners' families regarding their students. The Nebraska Department of Education requires schools to send out a home language survey (HLS), which will provide the school with specific data regarding the student's language experience and native language. This data will be used by the school to provide these students' teachers with specific strategies that will personalize the students' learning.

The second step is for the administrative team, along with the ESL team and/or an outside consultant, to create a professional development session that will take place prior to the start of the school year, and will focus on cultural awareness, the three types of English language learners, and specific strategies for classroom teachers to use with those learners. These strategies will help teachers to create personalized lesson plans to help students achieve better fluency and comprehension in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The administrator/presenter will provide a brief overview of each of the strategies listed in the Nebraska ELL Program Guide for Teachers. Focus will be on parent involvement, building relationships, recognizing and respecting family culture, and eye contact during the first quarter of the school year. Each of the four strategies will be explained in more detail, with examples given of each.

The third step in the action plan will take place when students return to school. Classroom teachers will administer a "valid and reliable English language proficiency assessment" as mandated by the Nebraska Department of Education, to identify the students' strengths and weaknesses (Nebraska Department of Education, 2012). This will help teachers create personalized plans for their students' learning.

The fourth step will be a second professional development session just after the end of the first quarter to dialogue with teachers about their experiences with their ELL students thus far. This sustained professional development will be used to check in on teachers' progress with the first four strategies. At this meeting, the administration and ESL team will add four more strategies to the teachers' tool box for implementation during the second quarter: linguistic modifications, gestures and body language, visuals, and hands-on activities. Each of the techniques will be explained in more detail, with examples given of each.

The fifth step will be a third professional development session approximately half way through the school year to monitor the progress and growth of the ELLs. The teachers will have administered formative assessments to their students in order to provide feedback on their progress in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The results will be analyzed at the professional development session and teachers will share their experiences with the strategies and modifications thus far. At this time, the last four techniques, scaffolding instruction, explicit vocabulary instruction, modeling or rephrasing, and native language supports, will be introduced and explained to the staff for third quarter implementation.

The sixth step will include a post-assessment administered by classroom teachers to measure ELL students' English fluency and comprehension at the end of the year. This data will be compared to the students' pre-assessments to determine areas of growth or regression.

The last step is reflection. Teachers will meet in teams to discuss how the strategies helped them enhance the learning of their ELL students during the year. They will reflect on which strategies had the most impact on student learning and recommend changes for the following year. The administrative team will use this information and input to determine how best to revise the program for the next school year. A brief summary of the action plan is on the far right.

RESOURCES

- Consultant and/or ESL specialist for professional development
- Demographic survey/questionnaire to determine type of English language learner
- Home Language Survey (HLS) for parents to complete about their student(s)
- Instructional manipulatives and activities to assist teachers in the implementation of the various learning techniques
- Nebraska ELL Program Guide for Administrators
- Nebraska ELL Program Guide for Teachers
- Pre- and post- assessments to assess literacy skills of English language learners and all students
- Professional development time for staff members prior to the start of school
- Professional development time for staff at least three times during the year
- Specific learning strategies and modifications for teachers

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Many of Nebraska's communities are experiencing increasing numbers of students who are English language learners. This is presenting a new challenge to Nebraska school districts, as these students typically have a more difficult time developing academic English. Their difficulty with the language hinders their ability to read and write, impacting their classroom performance, test scores, and overall success in school.

Rural schools typically have fewer resources than larger districts and must often rely on classroom teachers to meet the unique needs of the ELL students. These teachers must be equipped with cultural competence, as well as specific instructional tools and techniques in order to accelerate and enhance the students' English language learning.

The goal of this project is to provide educators with information and specific strategies necessary to facilitate literacy skills such as language development and comprehension for English language learners in the classroom. In particular, this will provide school districts without English as a Second Language programs with effective strategies to better engage ELL students in their classrooms.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

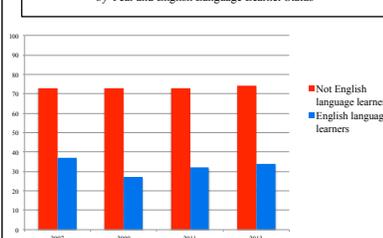
To begin this professional development initiative, the English language learners must be identified. In order to determine the specific needs of students, "Districts are required to identify students who have a home language other than English. All new students to a district should complete a Home Language Survey (HLS)" (Nebraska ELL Guide for Administrators, 2013, p. 4). Identified English language learners will be assessed in four areas for fluency: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, according to the Nebraska ELL Guide for Administrators. Within these areas it usually takes between five and ten years for learners to achieve academic language fluency, so each student will be at a different point in the process of achieving fluency. Freeman and Freeman identify three types of English language learners: 1) Long-term English learners; 2) Learners with limited schooling; and, 3) Learners proficient in their native language but not in English. It is important to identify the type of English language learner to help teachers personalize instruction so that all students are able to participate fully in the classroom.

ESL teachers are not the only educators in schools that have a responsibility for improving students' language skills. Classroom teachers also have the task of engaging all students in learning. "Given the growing numbers of English language learners and other students in need of language development in our classrooms, simply teaching content is no longer enough. Subject-matter teachers are being called upon to address the academic language that accompanies their content" (Hill & Miller, 2013, p. 6). When teachers are provided with the tools and techniques to help them bridge the language divide that can get in the way of learning and literacy, they are better able to accelerate their students' learning, helping them succeed in every aspect of education. "Teachers who are aware of ELL students' need to develop academic language fluency in English will be much better prepared to assist those students in becoming academically successful." (Nebraska ELL Program Guide, 2013, p 5). This is why it is so important for all teachers to be equipped with strategies to help ELL students.

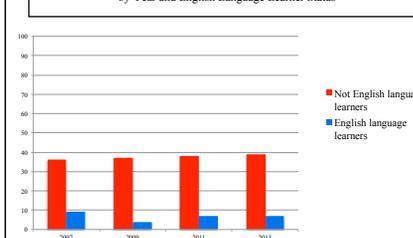
Teachers often do not feel qualified or ready to meet the unique needs of each of their students, while making sure the students' learning is personalized. "The cultural gap between students and their teachers can be a factor in students' academic performance and contribute to achievement gaps among different student groups." (NEA, 2008, p 1). By 4th grade, ELLs are already very behind in reading comprehension and fluency. To illustrate this, the "Average National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading Scale Percentages of 4th Graders in Public Schools at or Above Selected Reading Achievement Levels in Nebraska" is shown below (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). The figures illustrate that ELL students in Nebraska have consistently scored lower than students who are not English language learners over the past few years, highlighting the need for teachers to be better prepared when teaching English language learners.

The professional development opportunities provided by this school improvement plan will supply teachers with specific strategies to engage ELLs in classroom activities. The strategies "increase comprehension, learning, and interaction through modeling, acting out, gesturing, showing diagrams, and doing hands-on activities and experiments" (Nebraska ELL Guide for Administrators, 2013, p. 9). The Nebraska ELL Program Guide for Teachers has compiled a list of strategies and modifications for teachers to use to enhance student engagement and participation in the classroom. As stated by Crosson, "All teachers must view improvement in *all* language domains for *all* students as the responsibility of *all* teachers. As such, all teachers should be trained in techniques suited for teaching ELLs, as well as in ways to modify curriculum and delivery (in terms of adaptation of language) to make content more accessible for ELLs" (Crosson, 2012). Therefore, it is essential for all classroom teachers to be familiar and aware of these strategies to assist their students in linguistic mastery. These "dependable, straightforward techniques" will be provided to teachers, along with concrete examples and activities with which teachers will be able to use the strategies in their classrooms (Crosson, 2012). These techniques will result in classroom teachers feeling much more prepared and equipped to effectively teach all students, and in particular, English language learners.

Number of 4th Grade Students Scoring at or Above Basic Reading levels by Year and English Language Learner Status



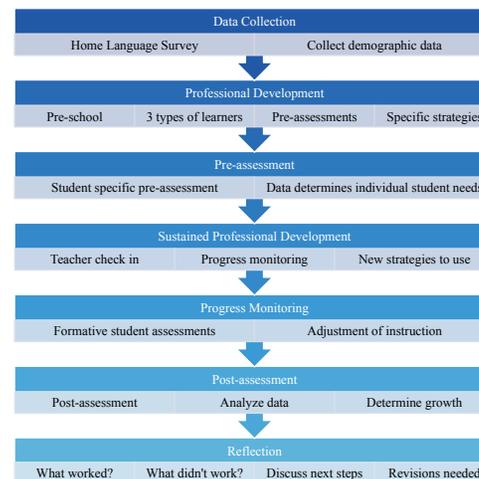
Number of 4th Grade Students Scoring at or Above Proficient Reading levels by Year and English Language Learner Status



Data provided by the National Center for Education Statistics.

TIMELINE & RESPONSIBILITIES

TIMELINE	EVENT	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE
1. Summer (July / August)	Distribute and collect surveys	School office personnel
2. August	Pre-school professional development for staff	Administrative team / outside consultant
3. September	Administer pre-tests	ESL coordinators / teachers
4. September / October / November	Embedded sustained educator development	Administrative team / outside consultant
5. January	Progress monitoring / formative assessment	Teachers
6. January / February / March	Embedded sustained educator development	Administrative team / outside consultant
7. April	Administer post-tests	ESL coordinators / teachers
8. May	Reflection	All staff



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