Improving Academic Competencies of English Language Learners through Educator Professional Development

Judy Stoehr – Creative Insights– jsinsights@cox.net
Megan Welch – Westside Community Schools – mwelch@westside66.org
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 critical information: specific data regarding the native language and native culture. This data will be used by the school to provide these students’ teachers with specific strategies that will personalize the students’ learning.

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 lingers until they read and write, impacting 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 learner 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 ESL LI Design Team, 2013, p. 4). Identified English language learners will be assessed in four areas for fluency: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, according to the Nebraska ESL LI Guide for Administrators. Within these areas it usually takes between five and ten years for learners to achieve academic fluency in English, 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.

ELL teachers are not the only educators in schools that have a responsibility for improving students’ language. Classroom teachers also have the task of engaging all students in learning. “Getting the growing numbers of English language learners and other students in language development is no simple task. At this meeting, the administration and ESL personnel will add four more strategies to the teachers’ toolbox for implementation and modification. Namely: Native language support, gestures and hands-on activities, each of the techniques will be explained in more detail, with examples given of each” (Hill & Miller, 2013, p. 7).

The final step will be a third professional development session approximately halfway through the school year to monitor the progress and growth of the ELLs. The teachers will have implemented informal strategies and techniques to their students. The teachers will 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 support, 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 language development 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 recording changes for the following year. The teachers will have the opportunity to adapt these strategies to their students’ needs and to determine how best to revise the program for the next school year. A brief reflection by the Nebraska ESL LI Design Team will result in classroom teachers feeling much more prepared and effectively teach all students, in particular, English language learners.

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 students
- Inventories and manipulatives to assist teachers in the implementation of the various learning techniques
- Nebraska Department of Education: K-12 Administrators
- Nebraska ESL LI Program 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 the school year
- Specific learning strategies and modifications for teachers

TIMELINE & RESPONSIBILITIES

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIMELINE</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
<th>PERSONNEL RESPONSIBLE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summer (July / August)</td>
<td>Sketch and collect surveys</td>
<td>School office personnel</td>
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<td>August</td>
<td>Pre-school professional development</td>
<td>Administrative team / outside consultant</td>
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<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>Pre-tests</td>
<td>Administrative team / outside consultant</td>
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<tr>
<td>September / October / November</td>
<td>Embedded sustained educator development</td>
<td>Administrative team / outside consultant</td>
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<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Progress monitoring</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>January / February / March</td>
<td>Embedded sustained educator development</td>
<td>Administrative team / outside consultant</td>
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<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>Administer post-tests</td>
<td>ELD coordinators / teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>All staff</td>
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</tbody>
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REFERENCES

- Crosson, B. (2012). Things every school leader should know about ESL.