



# Strategies to Assist English Language Learners in Accessing the Common Core Standards

## SUMMARY

A shared school and district vision for English language learners is necessary as the implementation of Common Core Standards unfolds. These authors describe various strategies for scaffolding student learning, each relevant in student access to new Standards. They highlight the importance of collaboration and commitment regarding outcomes for students who are learning English as a new language.

## *The New York State*

### *P-12 Common Core Learning*

*Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy (CCLS/ELA)* offer a number of advances or shifts in instruction for the teaching of English language arts across the content areas. First and foremost, they were developed to ensure that all students are college and career ready by the end of 12th grade. With this in mind, they contain sets of Anchor Standards in reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language that are consistent across all grade levels and promote an integrated model of literacy. However, as indicated in the introduction of the CCLS/ELA

document, the methods, materials, and instructional interventions necessary to foster academic growth with students who are English language learners (ELLs) are not specified.

As a result of the work of the New York State Bilingual Common Core Initiative, teachers working with ELLs will find new terminology and resources for addressing the needs of their students. The *New Language Arts Progressions (NLAP)* — formerly known as English as a Second Language Learning Standards — and the *Home Language Arts Progressions (HLAP)* — formerly known as Native Language Arts Learning Standards

*Carissa Hagan is a kindergarten through eighth grade ESL teacher at Sagamore Middle School and Grundy Avenue Elementary School in the Schem Central School District. She can be reached at [chagan@sachem.edu](mailto:chagan@sachem.edu)*

*Aristea Lucas is a sixth through eighth grade ESL teacher at Sagamore Middle School in the Schem Central School District. She can be reached at [alucas@sachem.edu](mailto:alucas@sachem.edu)*

*Andrea Honigsfeld is a professor in the Division of Education at Molloy College, Rockville Centre, NY. She can be reached at [ahonigsfeld@molloy.edu](mailto:ahonigsfeld@molloy.edu).*

*Maria Dove is an associate professor in the Division of Education at Molloy College, Rockville Centre, NY. She can be reached at [mdove@molloy.edu](mailto:mdove@molloy.edu).*

**Carissa Hagan, Sachem Central Teachers Association**  
**Aristea Lucas, Sachem Central Teachers Association**  
**Andrea Honigsfeld, Molloy College**  
**Maria Dove, Molloy College**

— are being developed to align with the NYS Common Core Learning Standards at every grade. The NLAP and the HLAP will be used to provide a framework for much of our teaching. The New York State Education Department has indicated that curriculum modules will be created to support the Progressions. The curriculum modules can be used to develop district curricula.<sup>1</sup>

In this article, the authors (ESL teachers in collaboration with higher education colleagues) will describe strategies that can be used with English language learners to support student achievement of the CCLS/ELA and build teacher expertise with the Instructional Shifts.

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### New Terminology!

New Language Arts Progressions

Formerly English as a Second Language Learning Standards

Home Language Arts Progressions

Formerly Native Language Arts Learning Standards

### New Levels!

5 Levels of Language Progressions (Entering, Emerging, Transitioning, Expanding and Commanding)

Formerly 4 Levels (Beginning, Intermediate, Advanced and Proficient)

From *EngageNY.org* of the New York State Education Department. *New York State Bilingual Common Core Initiative*. Retrieved from <http://engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-bilingual-common-core-initiative>

<sup>1</sup> These documents have been influenced by the Council of Chief State School Officers' 2012 publication, *Framework for English Language Proficiency Development Standards Corresponding to the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards*.

# Strategies to Assist English Language Learners in Accessing the Common Core Standards

## The Instructional Shifts Related to the Common Core Learning Standards in ELA and Literacy can be summarized as:

- balancing informational and literary text
- building knowledge in the disciplines through text
- having students read the central, grade-appropriate text around which instruction is centered
- focusing on text-based answers
- writing from sources
- building the academic vocabulary necessary to access complex texts

— See [EngageNY.org](http://EngageNY.org) of the New York State Education Department for more information

### English as a Second Language – Collaborative Model

Through this period of transition with new tools and frameworks related to students who are English language learners, sustained teacher collaboration around the Standards and Instructional Shifts is critical. In the Collaborative ESL Program at Sagamore Middle School in the Sachem Central School District, students who are English language learners not only attend ESL classes, they also have an ESL instructor in each of their content area courses. A co-teaching model allows for immediate

clarification and instructional guidance for an ESL student. This teaching model, and accompanying instructional strategies, support and build students' language proficiency and content knowledge.

In this co-teaching model, both teachers work with all students. This team is strong and positive and models for students how to be respectful and work with each other. This collaboration has assisted students in being more successful in all areas of their educational experience, from the classroom to the sports fields. The ongoing support of the Collaborative ESL Team builds students' self-esteem, and has increased their involvement in varied aspects of the school community.

### Providing Appropriate Scaffolding

As noted in the NYS Bilingual Common Core Initiative's *Teacher's Guide to Implement the Bilingual Common Core Progressions*, determining what specific scaffolds will be needed by individual students will be key to attaining the Standards. Scaffolding has been defined as "the support offered students so that they can successfully engage in activity beyond their current ability to perform independently..." (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2012, p. 48).

Preliminary performance indicators in the Progressions have scaffolding explicitly built into them, based on five levels of proficiency in the new language: Entering, Emerging, Transitioning, Expanding, and Commanding. The scaffolds are removed over time as students progress. Examples of scaffolds specified in the Progressions include glossaries, sentence starters, and rubrics. We have found the following types of scaffolding very effective in our work:

**Realia.** “Realia” is the use of actual objects and items brought into a classroom as examples or as aids to be talked or written about and used in teaching (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1992).

Realia can be employed in several ways. For example, realia can be used to aid the students’ comprehension of difficult vocabulary. Bringing in an object or visual representation allows students to connect what they already know with what they are learning — allowing for a deeper understanding of vocabulary and concepts. Students are better able to extract meaning from what they are reading in the classroom. (This is connected to CCLS Instructional Shift: Building knowledge in the disciplines through text.)

**Graphic Organizers.** Graphic organizers are a research-based strategy that can support learning and are referenced widely in the samples of Progressions. Students can use graphic organizers to find appropriate and relevant information from the text and record the information they have found. (This is connected to CCLS Instructional Shift: Focusing on text-based answers.)

**Strategies for Building Vocabulary.** Research suggests that direct vocabulary instruction helps activate a student’s prior knowledge and comprehension of content. “Students’ comprehension will increase by 33 percentile points when vocabulary instruction focuses on specific words important to the content they are reading” (Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986 as cited in Marzano, 2004, p. 68). Visual word walls are an effective technique used to scaffold vocabulary development. They are an organized display of key terms that include visual representations. Words for the word wall are continually added throughout a unit of study. Visual word walls foster independence in reading and writing tasks by increasing and building vocabulary. To provide consistency, similar visual word walls can be placed in both the ESL and content area classroom. In addition, we have found great value in

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the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008). SIOP is an instructional framework which focuses on content and academic vocabulary and increases comprehension for English language learners during instruction. (This is connected to CCLS Instructional Shift: Building the academic vocabulary necessary to access complex texts.)

**One-Pagers.** Student-created “one-pagers” are similar to a review sheet. One-pagers contain all of the concepts and/or facts needed to be successful during a learning activity or unit. During each reading assignment, the student decides (with an appropriate amount of support from the teacher) which information is important. As the student identifies key ideas within the reading assignment, he or she writes them down on one piece of paper that is used throughout the unit. During this process students can utilize the information on the one-pager to help them complete assignments and prepare for examinations. (This is connected to CCLS Instructional Shift: Writing from sources).

**Content Area Support Form.** Determining appropriate scaffolding is complex. A “Content Area Support Form” can be used to improve communication among team members who

are not able to participate in a co-teaching model (Lucas & Hagan, 2012). Some ESL teachers are in more than one building each day, which makes communication with every classroom teacher challenging. The utilization of a teacher-created form by both the classroom and ESL teacher can aid in communication for upcoming content.

## Looking Forward

With the implementation of the CCLS, teachers will need to discover and experiment with different instructional strategies to meet the needs of English language learners. Although educators do have concerns that need to be addressed, the CCLS can be seen as an opportunity for the examination of classroom practices and curricula to support favorable academic outcomes for students who are English language learners.

The question of instruction to help English language learners meet the CCLS is complicated, and solutions for moving students toward successful outcomes require more than simply identifying the best strategies. The entire school community — administrators, teachers, parents, and students — needs to collaborate in developing a comprehensive plan of action.

Following are some essential features to consider for such plans (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2013):

1. A shared vision for English language learners that all school members embrace and work toward making a reality.
2. A commitment to collaborative planning, instruction, and assessment to make academic content comprehensible and support the language and literacy development of English language learners.
3. Resources and professional development for teaching the necessary scaffolding methods English language learners need to access rigorous content.
4. Resources and professional development for explicitly instructing students in literacy and general learning strategies.
5. A delineation of content or topics necessary for English language learners that may be missing from Standards or curricula.

Successful implementation of the CCLS not only requires that teachers develop and apply appropriate methods and strategies to support the achievement of English language learners, it also requires that school administrators be actively involved in the process. Building leaders and other administrators must support a shared understanding of what is needed for English language learners. Collaborative teaching requires time, resources, and commitment at all levels.

It is these system-wide structures that allow the instructional supports listed above to be successfully delivered to students.

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