



STUDENTS OF TODAY ACHIEVING RESULTS

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Questions for Reflection

- (1) What are some current professional development efforts and future possibilities in your district that tackle the challenges inherent to the ELA/Literacy CCSS?
- (2) What do the instructional shifts mean for school leaders? What must school and district leaders do to ensure that teachers are supported as they work to implement these ELA/Literacy CCSS?
- (3) What do the ELA/Literacy CCSS imply for teachers of beginning level English language learners?
- (4) What do the increased language demands in the ELA/Literacy CCSS imply for ELD and content teachers?
- (5) What are some instructional implications of the ELA/Literacy CCSS's increased language demands for subject-area teachers?
- (6) What do the instructional shifts mean for the ways in which ELD teachers and subject-area teachers work together?
- (7) How can resources best be utilized to equip teachers and school leaders with the skills they need to unpack the ELA/Literacy CCSS for ELLs?

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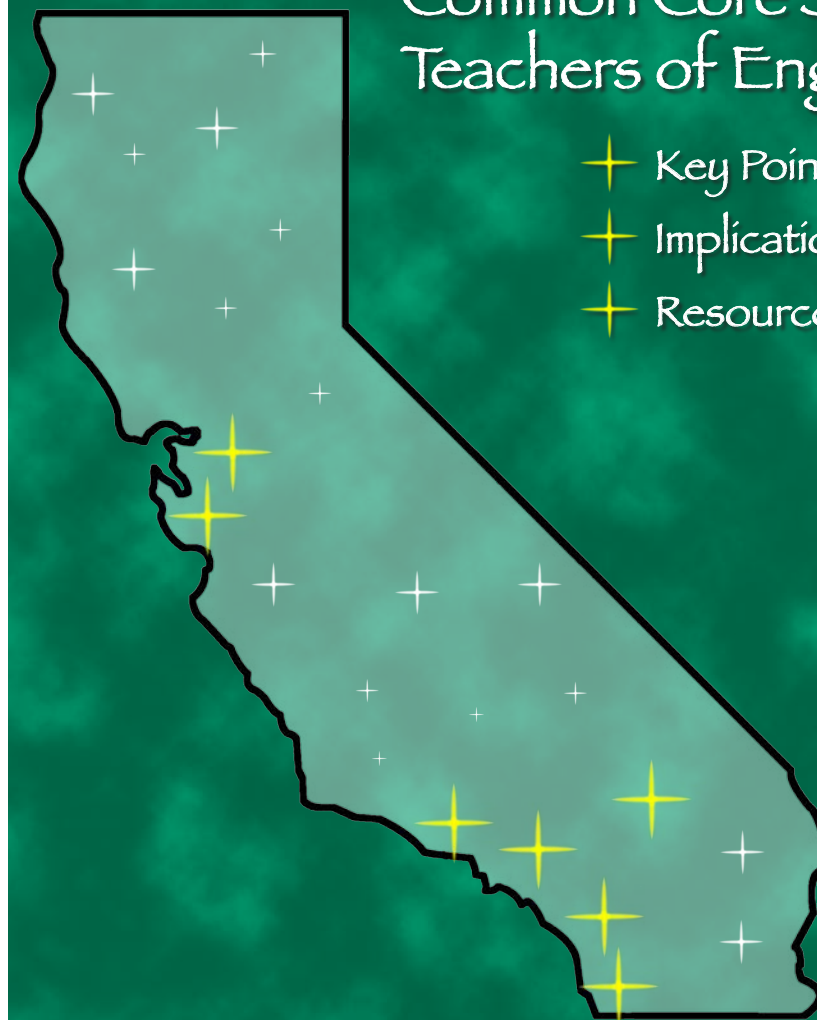


Research & Resources for English Learner Achievement

Issue 9

Unpacking the ELA and Literacy Common Core State Standards for Teachers of English Language Learners

- ✦ Key Points
- ✦ Implications
- ✦ Resources



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The Importance of Language in the ELA/Literacy Common Core State Standards

What do the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English Language Arts/Literacy imply with respect to English language learners (ELLs)? In a nutshell, the standards place an unprecedented emphasis on language. The CCSS ELA Student Portraits (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) describe the capacities of students who meet the standards as follows:

“Students can, without significant scaffolding, comprehend and evaluate complex texts across a range of types and disciplines, and they can construct effective arguments and convey intricate or multifaceted information. Likewise, students are able independently to discern a speaker’s key points, request clarification, and ask relevant questions. They build on others’ ideas, articulate their own ideas, and confirm they have been understood” (p. 7).

If what the ELA/Literacy CCSS imply for students is the use of language in sophisticated ways, they likewise require important shifts in instruction. This is especially critical for our ELLs. Bunch, Kibler, and Pimentel (2012) identify the following instructional shifts as essential in preparing students to attain new standards: (1) providing students regular practice with complex texts, (2) structuring opportunities for speaking and listening such that students are able to work collaboratively and present ideas, and (3) emphasizing reading, writing, and speaking that is grounded in evidence from the text.

Implications for Teachers

But how are teachers to make this shift? The following paragraphs offer some practical suggestions for designing standards-aligned instruction to support ELLs.

Shift #1: Use of complex texts

1. *Use accessible texts in preparation for reading more difficult texts.* For example, one of the ways teachers might prepare students for reading the Gettysburg Address is to have them first read simpler texts about other issues or topics related to that era — a short text about the Civil War, a short text about the practice of slavery in the United States, or a short text about Abraham Lincoln (Walqui, A., Koelsch, N. & Schmida, M., 2012).
2. *Provide guidance as to which words in a text are critical for achieving comprehension and which are not.* Telling students to look up every unknown word in a dictionary is not an effective strategy. Not only does this take up too much time, it also interferes with students’ comprehension of a text’s overall message. Students are served much better by looking up only those words which are critical for understanding the text’s larger meaning. Determining which words are essential to one’s understanding and which words are not might seem subjective to students. Developing this skill requires much discussion between students and their teacher.
3. *Focusing students’ attention on meaning-critical grammatical structures.* Where knowledge about a particular grammatical form is critical to correctly understanding the message, it should be taught. Teaching grammar for the sake of teaching grammar is not supported by research. The following sentence, for example, might cause students to become confused: “*The dog was so sweet, I couldn’t help but smile.*” Here, the construction “*I couldn’t help but*” refers to an inability to resist. A different way of conveying the same message would be “The dog was so sweet that I could not resist smiling.” Without knowing this, students might struggle to find meaning and incorrectly assume that someone was in need of help.
4. *Expanding students’ knowledge of how different kinds of texts are structured.* For example, what are the differences in the ways in which a book review is structured as opposed to a simple summary? To illustrate this, a teacher could show students a summary and a book review of the same book, highlighting the differences. A primary difference is that in a summary, there is no room for opinion by the author. It is simply an account of the most significant events. A book review, by contrast, requires that the author reveal something about the book’s characters, setting, and plot, and express his/her opinion about the book, using evidence.

Shift #2: Increased opportunities for speaking and listening

Previously, ELA standards have focused on what we think of as traditional literacy — reading and writing. Recognizing the importance of making presentations and working in groups, the ELA/Literacy CCSS stress the development of oral capacities. The three strategies we highlight for teachers include:

1. *Engaging students in individual, small-group, and whole-class discussions*
2. *Developing collaborative tasks that require students to participate in linguistically rich discussions*
3. *Allowing ELLs to collaborate with peers in their home language as they work on tasks to be completed in English*

Shift #3: Crafting arguments grounded in evidence from the text

The first anchor standard for reading states that students must, “read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it.” They must “cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Strategies include:

1. *Providing students with meaningful exposure to different types of texts, familiarizing students with various genres*
2. *Allowing students the opportunity to consider the strength of the evidence used by others in their arguments*
3. *Ensuring that students have meaningful opportunities to communicate about their writing — both with teachers and with peers*

Despite the significant shifts that are required by the ELA/Literacy CCSS, there is reason for optimism about what they can do for English language learners. This is a golden opportunity to bring language into the mainstream in education — something that can benefit all students — newcomers, long-term ELLs, students who speak non-standard varieties of English, and students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. Investing in new ways of teaching ELLs is a positive step toward adequately preparing them for the oral and literacy skills that the 21st century demands.

References

- Bunch, G. C., Kibler, A., & Pimentel, S. (2012). *Realizing opportunities for English learners in the Common Core English Language Arts and Disciplinary Literacy Standards*. Retrieved from Understanding Language: Language, Literacy, and Learning in the Content Areas website: ell.stanford.edu/papers
- Common Core State Standards Initiative. (2010). *Common Core State Standards for English language arts & literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects*. Retrieved from www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf
- Walqui, A., Koelsch, N., & Schmida, M. (2012). *Persuasion across time and space: Analyzing and producing persuasive texts*. Retrieved from Understanding Language: Language, Literacy, and Learning in the Content Areas website: ell.stanford.edu/teaching-resources

Online Resources

- California English Language Development Standards: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/el/er/eldstandards.asp>
- Common Core State Standards: www.corestandards.org/
- Framework for English Language Proficiency Development Standards corresponding to the Common Core State Standards and Next Generation Science Standards: www.ccsso.org/Resources/Publications/The_Common_Core_and_English_Language_Learners.html
- Understanding Language: ell.stanford.edu