

Effective Literacy  
Education for English  
Learner/Emergent  
Bilingual Students  
in California



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## SECTION 1

### Introduction

**Over one in four California students in the primary grades (where most literacy instruction occurs) are English learners—and 43% of the state’s school children live in homes in which languages other than English are spoken.** The literacy development of these students is an urgent equity issue for our state. In the last decade, California has stepped forward to lead a commitment to meeting the needs of these students through policies and state guidance closely aligned to the research about literacy and language development for English learners, dual language learners and second language learners. California has set forth a vision of multilingualism as a goal for our students, and has put into place comprehensive research-based frameworks and policies for the education of our culturally and linguistically diverse state. Today, as new literacy initiatives are taking shape, it is essential that they be aligned with and build upon the frame of California’s strong English learner policies that reflect the research on effective practices for English learner/Emergent Bilingual\* students and that honor the vision California has set for our students.

Four key state documents together guide literacy instruction for English Learners:

- 1 *The California English Language Development Standards*
- 2 *The EdGE Initiative*
- 3 *The California English Learner Roadmap policy, and*
- 4 *The California English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework)*

The guidance detailed in these documents is solidly grounded in approximately four decades of research with a distinct focus on second language literacy development and instruction. Section II (below) provides a Table that listing components of effective literacy education for English learners as derived from this research base, and specifies their alignment along the four state policy and guidance documents. A review of the four documents is in Section III.

## SECTION 2

### Alignment of California English Learner Policy and Guidance with the Research on Effective Literacy Education for English Learners.

Characteristic/Component of Effective Literacy Education for English Learners	CA ELD Standards	CA ELA/ELD Framework	CA English Learner Roadmap Policy	EdGE Initiative
Oral language plays a crucial foundational role in developing literacy in a second language. Oracy accelerates literacy acquisition and is the foundation for literacy.	X	X		
Literacy is strengthened when language and literacy development are integrated with and in the context of content and knowledge development.	X	X	X	X
Language and literacy development should be addressed across the curriculum.	X	X	X	X
Instruction in foundational reading skills is an important part of a literacy curriculum when taught in context. For English learners, attention to the differences between sound-text correspondence and phonology in a child's two languages is important.	X	X		
Good literacy instruction both builds on what students already know (including their culture and home language) and emphasizes building background knowledge as the basis for reading comprehension.	X	X		
Interrelationship of the four domains of language: reading, writing, speaking, listening—and the importance of focusing on all four as part of literacy development. Writing is an essential literacy skill, closely related to reading.	X	X		
Language and literacy instruction involve effective expression.	X	X		
Recognition that literacy development for students with two or more languages (additional language learners) is different from monolingual literacy development— and that literacy instruction for English learners needs to be responsive to this difference.	X	X		
Instruction must be modified for second language learners to scaffold participation and comprehension and build language skills in the new language.	X	X	X	



Characteristic/Component of Effective Literacy Education for English Learners	CA ELD Standards	CA ELA/ELD Framework	CA English Learner Roadmap Policy	EdGE Initiative
Important role of home language as a foundation for developing literacy in English.	X	X	X	X
There are benefits of biliteracy, and the development of strong biliteracy skills requires a dual language pedagogy involving the strategic and inter-related use of two languages.	X	X	X	X
Cross-language connections build a metalinguistic understanding of how language works across language systems and strengthens literacy in both languages.	X	X		
High quality and equitable instructional materials are an important component of reading instruction—and provide exposure to expressive, authentic, academic and complex language.	X	X	X	
Dual language and bilingual/biliteracy programs are an effective and beneficial language program model with equal or better outcomes in English proficiency and literacy for English learners compared to English-only instructed models.		X	X	X
The document cites key research literature** on effective literacy instruction for English learners—or explicitly was developed to align with that research.	X	X	X	

The above components together collectively comprise effective literacy instruction for English learner students.



## SECTION 3

### The Policy and Guidance Landscape

Four key state documents/policies together provide a framework for effective literacy instruction for English Learners (supported by a publication designed to bring research to practice). Based upon the research on second language and dual language development, these documents are intended to inform and guide literacy instruction practices for English learners throughout the state.

#### THE CALIFORNIA ELA/ELD FRAMEWORK: (2014) STATE GUIDANCE FOR IMPLEMENTING STANDARDS

In July 2014, the California State Board of Education approved and adopted a new English Language Arts/English Language Development Framework (ELA/ELD Framework) that applies to all students. It provided a blueprint and guidance to educators, parents, and publishers to support the implementation of both the California Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects and the California English Language Development Standards. The framework is a massive and groundbreaking document that repositioned ELD and literacy as integrated and centrally relevant to participation, study, and mastery of all academic content. The framework:

- Promotes an integrated and interdisciplinary approach to literacy and language instruction;
- Discusses literacy and language instruction in terms of five crosscutting themes (Meaning Making, Language Development, Effective Expression, Content Knowledge, and Foundational Skills);
- Advocates for a range of reading in school and through organized independent reading;
- Positions cultural diversity, multilingualism, and biliteracy as valuable resources and assets;
- Applies to all content areas; presents numerous examples of a comprehensive approach to ELD, which includes both integrated and designated ELD; and
- Emphasizes the shared responsibility for literacy and language instruction among educators.

The ELA/ELD Framework integrates the California Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts with the California English Language Development Standards. The Framework introduced and defined the concept that California's EL students should be provided comprehensive ELD, which includes both *integrated* and *designated* ELD instruction. Integrated ELD instruction occurs throughout the school day in every subject area by every teacher who has an EL student in the classroom. Designated ELD is provided to ELs during a protected time in the regular school day. Designated and Integrated ELD have a symbiotic relationship in the development of language: Designated ELD provides targeted instruction addressing English learners' proficiency levels and language needs based on formative assessment; Integrated ELD addresses language development within academic disciplinary contexts related to the academic tasks and content. The CA ELD Standards are used in tandem with the CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy and other content standards to ensure that students strengthen their abilities to use academic English as they learn content through English. Teachers use the CA ELD Standards as the focal standards in ways that build into and from content instruction to develop critical language ELs need for content learning in English.

Chapter 6 of the California English Language Development (ELD) Standards provides a research summary of key findings that explicitly address Foundational Literacy Skills instruction for English Learners, as well as general guidance on providing instruction for ELs on foundational skills.





## CALIFORNIA'S ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT (ELD) STANDARDS (2012)

In 2012, the State Board of Education approved and adopted a new set of English language development (ELD) standards for all pupils identified as English learners, to enable them to attain proficiency in English as needed for academic participation throughout the curriculum. The CA ELD Standards define the progression of language acquisition through three stages of proficiency and describe the key knowledge, skills, and abilities that students who are learning English as a new language need in order to access, engage with, and achieve in grade-level academic content. Covering all four domains of language (reading, writing, listening and speaking), the standards speak as well to the inter-relationship between these domains. It is within this context that literacy instruction is addressed. The CA ELD Standards align with the key knowledge, skills, and abilities for achieving college and career readiness described in the California Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy). The CA ELD Standards do not simply replicate the CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy, nor do they represent ELA content at lower levels of achievement or rigor. Instead, the CA ELD Standards are designed to provide challenging content in English language development for ELs to gain proficiency in a range of rigorous academic English language skills. The ELD Standards reflect the research in the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth. All instruction for English learners (in ELD and in content instruction) are to be aligned to these standards.

## EDGE: (2016) STATE MANDATE FOR LANGUAGE ACQUISITION PROGRAMS—INCLUDING ENGLISH LEARNER ACQUISITION PROGRAMS, BILINGUAL/DUAL-LANGUAGE OPTIONS

The California Education for a Global Economy (CA EdGE) initiative was overwhelmingly adopted by the voters of California as Proposition 58 and became state law governing English learner education in July 2017. The purpose of the CA EdGE Initiative is to ensure that all children in California public schools receive the highest quality education, master the English language, and access high-quality, innovative, and research-based language programs that prepare them to participate in a global economy—including bilingual/dual-language programs. (EC Section 300[n].). The initiative defined language acquisition programs as educational programs designed for English learners to ensure English is acquired as rapidly and effectively as possible, that provide instruction to pupils on the academic content and English Language Development (ELD) standards through Integrated and Designated ELD.

“Language acquisition programs shall be informed by research and shall lead to grade-level proficiency and academic achievement in both English and another language.”

– EC Section 306[c]; 5 CCR sections 11300[d] and 11309[c].

This is the basis for the required Integrated and Designated ELD services. EdGE also specifies that language acquisition programs may include, but are not limited to, all of the following: Dual-Language Immersion, Transitional Bilingual, Developmental Bilingual, and Structured English Immersion (SEI)—thus explicitly allowing for bilingual and dual-language programs in addition to English-taught approaches. The Dual Language Immersion, Transitional Bilingual and Developmental Bilingual models contain coordinated literacy instruction in two languages and the development of cross-language capabilities.

## THE CALIFORNIA ENGLISH LEARNER ROADMAP: (2017) OVERARCHING STATE ENGLISH LEARNER POLICY— A VISION, MISSION AND PRINCIPLES FOR EL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

In July 2017, the California State Board of Education unanimously adopted a new policy for English learners, the California English learner Roadmap: Educational Programs and Services for English learners. This policy superseded the 1998 English learner policy which was based upon Proposition 227. The EL Roadmap set a new vision and mission for the schools, and was developed as an aspirational statement of what should be in place for the state's 1.2 million English learners. The comprehensive policy speaks to standards, curriculum frameworks, instruction, access, assessment, program design, and pathways, accountability/school improvement, educator quality and capacity, early childhood/preschool, social and family support services, and parent/community involvement.

As policy, the primary intended audiences are school districts and county offices of education. All educators are responsible for implementing the policy. The EL Roadmap sets a vision and mission for California schools that promises full and meaningful access and participation from early childhood through graduation from 12th grade, and results in attaining high levels of English proficiency, mastery of grade-level standards, and opportunities to develop proficiency in multiple languages. It calls upon schools to affirm, welcome and respond to a diverse range of English learners, and to prepare them with the linguistic, academic and social skills needed for college, career and civic participation in a global, diverse, and multilingual world. Four research-based principles are articulated to guide implementation: 1) assets-oriented and needs-responsive, 2) high intellectual quality of instruction and meaningful access, 3) creation of system conditions that will support effectiveness, and 4) alignment and articulation within and across the system.

Today, as new literacy initiatives are taking shape, it is essential that they be aligned with and build upon the frame of California's strong English learner policies that reflect the research on effective practices for English learner students and that honor the vision California has set for our students.

## IMPROVING EDUCATION FOR MULTILINGUAL AND ENGLISH LEARNER STUDENTS: FROM RESEARCH TO PRACTICE. *California Department of Education, 2020*

In 2020, in response to the new generation of education policies in California and to the increasingly strong consensus in the research field of English learner and dual language education, the California Department of Education commissioned and published a collection of papers on effective evidence-based practices for educating multilingual and English learner students. It is intended to be a resource within the California System of Support—assisting local educational agencies in building local capacity to sustain improvement and effectively address outcomes for multilingual and English learner students. This publication complements the English Learner Roadmap Policy and Guidance, the California Education for a Global Economy Initiative, the Global California 2030 Initiative, the State Seal of Biliteracy, the World Languages Standards, the Social and Emotional Learning Guiding Principles, and the statewide content standards and curriculum frameworks.





## A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

English learner is the formal term used for students in TK-12 education who have a home language other than English and are learning English as a second language but do not yet have sufficient proficiency to participate in an academic program in English without supports. The term “Emergent bilinguals” is both a more assets-based term for English learners because it embraces the development of both of their languages, and also applies to students who may have proficiency in English and are living in and across multiple language worlds, developing and using both of their languages.



The characteristics and components of effective literacy instruction for English Learners referred to in this brief are discussed in more depth in a companion white paper published by the National Committee on Effective Literacy: Escamilla, K., Olsen, L., & Slavik, J. (2022) *"Toward Comprehensive Effective Literacy Policy and Instruction for English Learner/Emergent Students"*.

[www.MultiLingualLiteracy.org](http://www.MultiLingualLiteracy.org)

## REFERENCES

*\*\*Key references include the meta-analyses and research summaries contained in the National Literacy Panel for Language Minority Children and Youth, and Promising Futures.*

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**California Committee  
for Effective Literacy**

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The California Committee on Effective Literacy (CCEL) uplifts research, policies and practices to ensure that English learner/emergent bilingual students leave school as proficient readers and writers in English and preferably more languages and who thrive and succeed in school and their communities. We are researchers, teacher educators, teachers, administrators, school board members and advocates from across California with deep expertise in literacy and the education of English learners/emergent bilingual students.