

Closing the Achievement Gap Part One: Introduction

Three goals serve as the lodestar for planning, decision-making, and resource allocation in Denver Public Schools:

- Hold high expectations for all learners,
- Increase student achievement, and
- Close the achievement gap between sub classifications of student groups based on race/ethnicity, disability, language status, and socio-economic status.

Denver Public Schools currently serves approximately 16,000 English-Language Learners (ELLs), representing about 24% of the district's total enrollment. Of this group, 15,000 students are Spanish speaking. To progress toward the districts' goals, the needs of these students must be placed squarely in the mainstream of how schools do business and make decisions about teaching, learning, planning, and educational reform. Organizing financial and human resources at the district and school levels to meet the needs of *all* students requires, in turn, a thorough understanding of the conditions that foster second-language development and an awareness of the political context surrounding linguistic and cultural diversity (Miramontes, Nadeau, & Commins, 1997).

To advance these purposes Superintendent Jerry Wartgow formed the ELD and the Transition Policy Workgroups in September 2002 and charged them to draft a vision and detailed plan to meet the needs of English-language learners and close the achievement gap in DPS. The committee members represented a broad base of stakeholders, including district-level administrators, principals, and teachers from the district's four geographic quadrants. The workgroups examined the challenges facing schools, gathered current successful instructional practices, reviewed the research on best practices, and participated in discussions with national and local experts in the field.

The recommendations of the workgroups are designed to guide district and school-based instructional decisions within the parameters of the district's existing English Language Acquisition Program Plan. The United States District Court approved and ordered the implementation of this plan in June 1999. The ELA Program Plan, which meets or exceeds Colorado and federal guidelines, requires DPS to use efficient and effective techniques to provide students with the English-language skills they need to meaningfully participate in the mainstream English-language instructional program. The plan addresses issues related to program identification, placement, progression, and personnel requirements. The recommendations of the ELD/Transition Workgroups set out in this document define the "efficient and effective techniques" required but not specified in that plan.

Part Two: Vision

Students will be provided the opportunity for literacy and concept development in their native language as a foundation for learning to read and write in their second language, which represents a cognitive, social, and economic asset for them as individuals as well as for our society. Students from both English and non-English backgrounds learn to respect themselves and their own culture as well as the cultures of the broader society.

The English-language program includes planned daily instruction; attention to the English-language environment to ensure that students receive comprehensible input and are allowed ample opportunities for interaction; a balance of program components in oral language, reading, writing, and content; an integrated curriculum; and explicit instruction in learning strategies. Children have the opportunity to develop literacy and concepts in their native language; opportunities for English-language development, separate from native English speakers; and environments that provide English models in structured cross-cultural opportunities.

Teachers make instructional decisions based on the goals of the immediate lesson *and* long-range plans for transition, applying sound principles of learning and language development. Teachers decide which language to use guided simultaneously by the need to assure comprehension and engagement on the one hand, while supporting students towards greater use of the English language on the other hand. Transition decisions are driven by the student's first and second language and literacy acquisition.

Schools adopt and teachers use research-based instructional programs and materials for beginning reading instruction that provide comprehensive, well-organized instructional plans and practice opportunities that permit all children to make sense of reading. School communities participate in and share responsibility for a planning process to structure learning environments to best address the needs of ELL students within the limits of the human and financial resources available to meet those needs (Miramontes, Nadeau, & Commins, 1997).

Part Three: Guidelines and Recommendations

1. Transition Plan—In Transitional Native Language Instruction (TNLI), schools decisions regarding transition to formal English literacy instruction, program progression, and exiting are based on a student’s oral language and reading proficiency in their first and second language. In ESL schools, the same guidelines apply to a student’s oral language and reading proficiency in their second language.

Clear and explicit language development standards that reflect the same high expectations of all students should guide instruction and decisions regarding transition to formal literacy instruction, program progression, and exit from the ELL program. Standards will mark student progress through various transition levels to the point where students are able to meaningfully participate academically in English, and when applicable, have achieved a solid foundation in their primary language. Teachers make content comprehensible by initially teaching students in their native language with the long-range goal of moving students toward use of their second language as they acquire new concepts. As students make this progression, teachers must break down the conceptual and linguistic load of the new content to ensure that both language and concepts are comprehensible to English-language learners.

Students are placed at a designated level based on oral and literacy assessments that evaluate their English-language development. Decisions regarding the language of instruction are based on a student’s progression level.

Recommendations:

- 1.1 Initially adopt English-language development (ELD) standards reflective of current guidelines that scaffold language learning and prepare students to meaningfully participate in the English-language classroom.
- 1.2 Assess student progress toward achieving the ELD standards quarterly to inform instruction and allow for the fluid grouping of students based on their language acquisition.
- 1.3 Provide the professional development opportunities all teachers need to develop a clear understanding of the new ELD standards and of the teaching structures and strategies that comprise high-quality instruction for linguistically diverse students, including understanding of the transferability of languages.
- 1.4 Provide research-based instructional programs and materials in literacy and language development to ensure systematic and comprehensive instruction.
- 1.5 Support the creation of an online clearinghouse of effective strategies to support English-language development. The clearinghouse will be accessible to all DPS teachers and searchable by grade level, content area, and language level.

2. Primary Language Development—Provide students the opportunity for literacy and concept development in their native language as a foundation for learning to read and write in English.

Literacy is the foundation on which students build academic success. When initial literacy instruction occurs in their native language, students are better able to understand, clarify, make connections, analyze, and raise questions that extend concepts to a higher level of understanding. A number of researchers (Krashen & Biber, 1988; Ramirez, Yuen & Ramey, 1991; Cummins, 1989, 1991; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) have found that literacy instruction in the native language is the most pedagogically sound way to teach students acquiring English about the relationship between meaning and print in both the native language and English. Literacy in the native language has been found to be the most stable predictor of English literacy (Pardo & Tinajero, 1993). In fact, research shows that students with high levels of literacy proficiency in their native language perform better on tasks of academic English than students with low levels of language and literacy proficiency in their native language (Lindholm & Zierlein, 1991; Snow, 1990). “There is good reason to support reading in both first and second language. Free reading in the first language may mean more reading, and hence more literacy development in the second language” (Krashen, 1995, p. 8).

Literacy instruction that occurs in Spanish needs to be grounded in a knowledge base of the structure of the Spanish language and of best instructional practices in English literacy and in Spanish literacy.

Recommendations:

- 2.1 Develop teacher’s understanding of the similarities and differences of literacy development in English and Spanish, including linguistic analysis of both languages, to apply in the literacy instruction of ELLs.
- 2.2 Provide rich, equitable resources and instructional materials in both languages for teachers to use as they implement the district’s ELA program.
- 2.3 Provide participating teachers with a professional development opportunities and resources to be used on an ongoing basis during the weekly area specialist/coach and coach/teacher meetings.
- 2.4 Provide Spanish Literacy Enrichment (SLE) to bilingual students who have transitioned to English literacy at grades 4 and 5. Research indicates that continued use of the native language by bilingual students supports a successful transition to English literacy and continued academic success.

**3. Assessment and Accountability for Instruction in the First and Second Language—
Adopt a comprehensive assessment plan based on both the oral language and literacy
development in a student’s first and second language.**

Instructional assessment should encompass a student’s first and second language and literacy development. Care must be taken to ensure that assessment instruments are used for their intended purposes, which might include diagnosing individual needs, informing instruction, and providing accountability information.

Recommendations:

- 3.1 Use the Pre-LAS and LAS-O to measure oral language development in English.
- 3.2 Use the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and the Evaluación del Desarrollo de la Lectura (EDL) to measure progress toward meeting state and national literacy benchmarks in a students’ first and second language.
- 3.3 Apply the assessment results to determine a student’s reading and oral-language levels and develop a clear program progression for ELLs based on the literacy and language assessment in first and second language. (Note: Students being served in English as a Second Language programs will need to meet reading levels as measured by the DRA and oral language levels as measured by the LAS-O. However, they will not need to meet Spanish literacy levels as measured by the EDL since native language instruction is not provided.)
- 3.4 Develop a clearly defined structure within each school that coordinates the functions of Pupil/Peer/Parent Assistance Teams (PAT), School Community Assistance Teams (CSAT), Staffing Committees, and the Instructional Services Advisory Teams (ISA).

**Program Progression for Student Entering the District at the Primary Grades
(ECE–2)
Level Indicators**

	Spanish Reading Level	English Reading Level	English Oral- Language Level
Beginner	EDL A–16	DRA A–6	LAS-O 1–2
Intermediate	EDL 18–28	DRA 6–16	LAS-O 3
Advanced	EDL 30–38	DRA 18–24	LAS-O 3
Transitional	EDL 40+	DRA 28–38 QRI 4–4 th QRI 5–5 th	LAS-O 4–5

Recognizing that ELLs enter DPS at all levels, the following chart detail program progression for students entering at or above grade 3.

**Program Progression for Student Entering the District at the Intermediate Grades
(Third–Fifth *New Arrivals*)
Level Indicators**

	Spanish Reading Level	English Reading Level	Oral-Language Development
New Arrival Stage 1	EDL 0–28	DRA A–8	LAS-O 1–2
New Arrival Stage 2	EDL 30–38	DRA 10–20	LAS-O 3
New Arrival Stage 3	EDL 40+	DRA 22–38 QRI 4–4 th QRI 5–5 th	LAS-O 3

4. Planned and Systematic Use of Two Languages for Instruction—Schools will provide classroom environments that support first- and second-language development through planned daily instruction in which the language of instruction is clearly identified.

Both Spanish and English have viable instructional functions for use by teachers. The teachers’ choice of which language to use should be planned and systematic to support learners through the acquisition of new knowledge and the gradual acquisition of a second language. Language-use policy should not rely on translation or code-switching. Constant translation, the restatement of information word by word, sentence by sentence, or idea by idea, can lead to dependency on the native language and delayed acquisition of the second language (Wong-Fillmore, 1982). Informal code-switching, which does not restate but adds information, can produce gaps in information and instruction due to inconsistent and unplanned language use. In contrast, planned and systemic use of two languages focuses on students’ use of language during the learning process, while focusing simultaneously on their language needs. The classroom learning environment should reflect high-quality, single-language environments for literacy and concept development. This is accomplished in two ways—by differential grouping and by gradational use of language over time during teacher-directed lessons.

Recommendations:

- 4.1 The tables below set out language use guidelines in TNLI schools for students entering the district at the primary grades (ECE–2) and for new arrivals at the intermediate grades (3–5).

**Language Use Guidelines (TNLI Schools)
for Student Entering the District at the Primary Grades (ECE–2)
Based on Oral and Reading Proficiency**

Level Indicators	Reading/ Writing	Skills Block	ELD	Math	Science/ Social Studies	Specials
<i>Beginner</i> EDL A–16 DRA A–6 LAS-O 1–2	Spanish	Spanish	English using ESL strategies	Spanish (4 days) Concept Development (CD) English CD (1 day) using sheltering techniques	Spanish (4 days) Concept Development (CD) English CD (1 day) using sheltering techniques	English using sheltering techniques
<i>Intermediate</i> EDL 18–28 DRA 6–16 LAS-O 3	Spanish	Spanish	English using ESL strategies	Spanish (3 days) Concept Development (CD) English CD (2 days) using sheltering techniques	Spanish (3 days) Concept Development (CD) English CD (2 days) using sheltering techniques	English using sheltering techniques
<i>Advanced</i> EDL 30–38 DRA 18–24 LAS-O 3	Spanish/ English using ESL strategies & sheltering techniques	English using ESL strategies & sheltering techniques	English using ESL strategies	English using sheltering techniques/ L1 Extensions and/or Clarification	English using sheltering techniques/ L1 Extensions and/or Clarification	English using sheltering techniques
<i>Transitional</i> EDL 40+ DRA 28–38 QRI 4–4 th QRI 5–5 th LAS-O 4–5	English	English	English using ESL strategies	English using sheltering techniques	English using sheltering techniques	English using sheltering techniques

**Language Use Guidelines (TNLI Schools)
for Student Entering the District at the Intermediate Grades
(Third–Fifth *New Arrivals*)
Based on Oral and Reading Proficiency**

Level Indicators	Reading/ Writing	Skills Block	ELD	Math	Science/ Social Studies	Specials
<i>New Arrival Stage 1</i> EDL 18–28 DRA A–8 LAS-O 1–2	Spanish	Spanish	English using ESL strategies	Spanish (3 days) Concept Development (CD) English CD (2 day) using sheltering techniques	Spanish (3 days) Concept Development (CD) English CD (2 day) using sheltering techniques	English using sheltering techniques
<i>New Arrival Stage 2</i> EDL 30–38 DRA 10–20 LAS-O 3	Spanish/ English using ESL strategies & sheltering techniques	Spanish	English using ESL strategies	Spanish (2 days) Concept Development (CD) English CD (3 days) using sheltering techniques	Spanish (2 days) Concept Development (CD) English CD (3 days) using sheltering techniques	English using sheltering techniques
<i>New Arrival Stage 3</i> EDL 40+ DRA 22–38 LAS-O 3	English using ESL strategies & sheltering techniques/ L1 Extensions and/or Clarification	English using ESL strategies & sheltering techniques	English using ESL strategies	English using sheltering techniques/ L1 Extensions and/or Clarification	English using sheltering techniques/ L1 Extensions and/or Clarification	English using sheltering techniques

4.2 The table below sets out language use guidelines for ESL schools. In ESL schools, English-language learners receiving program services should be placed in the same classroom to the extent possible (For example, if there are six ELLs at the first grade, all six should be placed in the same classroom and provided instruction by a highly qualified ELA-E teacher.) When students are dispersed, the challenge of providing differentiated instruction is exacerbated by the need for more ELA-E teachers. In addition, the needs of ELLs may be overlooked as teachers juggle the day-to-day demands of trying to meet the needs of all learners.

Language Use Guidelines (ESL Schools)

Level Indicators	Reading/ Writing	Skills Block	ELD	Math	Science/ Social Studies	Specials
<i>All Levels</i>	English using ESL strategies & sheltering techniques	English using ESL strategies & sheltering techniques	English using ESL strategies	English using ESL strategies & sheltering techniques	English using ESL strategies & sheltering techniques	English using ESL strategies & sheltering techniques

5. English Language Development (ELD)—Schools will provide all speakers of other languages high-quality English-language development instruction and materials.

When young children whose home language is not English first arrive in a classroom where English is one of the languages used, they are at the starting point of a new developmental pathway, a pathway that leads to the development of skills in a second language. Although there will be differences in the way that children pursue learning a second language, researchers have noted a consistent developmental sequence for young children:

1. There may be a period of time when children continue to use their home language in the second-language situation.
2. When they discover that their home language does not work in this situation, children enter a nonverbal period as they collect information about the new language and perhaps spend some time in sound experimentation.
3. Children begin to go public, using individual words and phrases in the new language.
4. Children begin to develop productive use of the second language.

When young second-language learners begin to use their new language, researchers have noted two consistent features: the use of *telegraphic speech* and *formulaic speech*. Once second language-learning children acquire a number of vocabulary items and useful phrases, they begin the process of productive language use, which means they can begin building their own sentences, not just combining words to repeat formulaic phrases or names for people and things. However, as in all developmental processes, there are definite differences in how children approach this developmental pathway. These differences influence how quickly they proceed along it.

Learning a new language is a complex task. Students must learn English grammar, sounds, word forms, and word meaning (syntax, phonology, morphology, and semantics). Learning a language to communicate in social situations occurs relatively quickly. It can take anywhere from a year to two years. Learning a language to perform demanding academic functions in all content areas takes longer. It takes five years or more before second-language learners develop the full range of proficiency they need to be successful across all social and academic contexts (Collier, 1987, 1989; Cummins, 1986).

Recommendations:

- 5.1 Provide all speakers of other languages high-quality English-language development instruction and materials through an established 45-minute ELD block at all levels.
- 5.2 Assist teachers in creating classroom environments that help second-language learners feel secure and competent, making the task of learning a second language much easier.
- 5.3 Implement English-language development standards (refer to 1.1) that will be taught, assessed, and analyzed quarterly to inform instruction and facilitate the grouping of students based on their language acquisition.
- 5.4 Provide participating teachers with a professional development library and text-based discussion protocols to be used during the weekly coach/teacher meetings.
- 5.5 Support the creation of an online clearinghouse of effective strategies to support language development in English. The database will be accessible to all DPS teachers and searchable by grade level, content area, and language level.

6. Differential Grouping and Regrouping—Teachers will use flexible combinations of student groups based on language and literacy development during the Reading, Writing, Skills, and ELD Block.

Using flexible combinations of students grouped within or across grade levels allows schools to capitalize on the language strengths of teachers to meet the needs of all students. As previously stated, when students are dispersed, the challenge of providing differentiated instruction is exacerbated by the need for more ELA-E teachers. In addition, the needs of ELLs may be overlooked as teachers juggle the day-to-day demands of trying to meet the needs of all learners.

Recommendations:

- 6.1 Structure learning environments to draw on the language strengths of teachers for literacy and language development.
- 6.2 Reorganize teacher resources to support literacy instruction at the primary levels by teachers who speak the child's native language.
- 6.3 Group and regroup for content-area instruction to ensure that students have strong models of native English proficiency utilizing the preview/review strategy.
- 6.4 Group by student's language level for ELD Block.

7. Sheltered Instruction—Teachers will present academic subject matter to English-language learners using comprehensible language and context, enabling information to be understood by the learner.

For English-language learners to succeed, they must master not only English vocabulary and grammar, but also the way English is used in core content classes (e.g., language arts, science, math, and social studies). It includes the semantic and syntactic knowledge of English as well as functional language uses. In their content classes, English-language learners must pull together their emerging knowledge of the English language with the content knowledge they are studying to complete academic tasks, such as generating the format of an outline, negotiating roles in cooperative learning, or interpreting charts and maps. These three knowledge bases—knowledge of English, knowledge of the content topic, and knowledge of how the various learning tasks are to be accomplished—constitute the major components of academic literacy (Short, 1998).

The primary goal of sheltered instruction is to teach academic subject matter to English-language learners using comprehensible language and context. The sheltered instruction model shares many strategies found in high-quality, non-sheltered teaching for native English speakers, but it is characterized by careful attention to the English-language learners' distinctive second-language development needs. The sheltered instruction model developed by the Center for Applied Learning (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2000) provides a framework for selecting and organizing instructional techniques and strategies that integrate standards for English-language development and for specific content areas.

Sheltered instruction functions as a support until a student is ready for mainstream classes. While the content objectives are usually defined by the curriculum or the text being used by the teacher, language objectives are defined by the needs of the students and their level of proficiency in English. This requires effective assessment of all skill areas: reading, writing, and oral proficiency (Short, 1998).

Recommendations:

- 7.1 Organize professional development sessions in the Sheltered Instruction model.
- 7.2 Provide participating teachers with professional development opportunities and resources to be used on an ongoing basis during the weekly area specialist/coach and coach/teacher meetings.
- 7.3 Provide professional development on the Sheltered Instruction model that culminates in the creation and application of integrated instructional units, affording teachers the opportunity to apply the sheltered instruction approach to their practice.
- 7.4 Support the creation of an online clearinghouse of sheltered lesson plans in a variety of subject areas. The clearinghouse will be available to all DPS teachers and searchable by grade level, subject area, and language level.

Conclusion

By implementing the recommendations of the English Language Development (ELD) and Transition Workgroups for Elementary Schools at all program schools, Denver Public Schools will:

- Hold high expectations for all learners,
- Increase student achievement, and
- Close the achievement gap between sub classifications of student groups based on race/ethnicity, disability, language status, and socio-economic status.

This document is intended to guide both district and school-based instructional decisions within the parameters of the existing court order. This initiative will move DPS beyond merely being in compliance with the federal and state guidelines to deepening teacher understandings and student proficiencies in English-language acquisition.