

DRAFT DEFINITION: Focus of ESL Instruction (V. 3/30/15)

GOAL:

1. The goal of **ESL** instruction is to advance language development and to promote academic achievement. English language proficiency includes social¹ **and academic** language in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. ESL instruction provides systematic, explicit, and sustained language instruction, and prepares students for general education by focusing on academic language². Effective ESL instruction supports student success in school, including improvement of ACCESS scores and acceleration of academic achievement. Effective ESL instruction also supports long term goals such as college and career readiness. ESL instruction, with its own dedicated time and curriculum, is a required component of any program serving ELLs (SEI, TBE, Two-Way Bilingual, etc.).

ALIGNMENT:

2. The ESL curriculum is aligned to WIDA and to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks (henceforth referred to as “the Frameworks”).

FOCUS:

3. ESL is its own subject matter. The subject matter knowledge required of ESL teachers is outlined in 603 CMR 7.00.

4. ESL is based on the research, theory, and pedagogy of second language acquisition within the context of the Frameworks. ESL is language driven, but general education content is the vehicle for language development within a sociocultural context. Language forms and functions are taught within rich, contextualized, and meaningful circumstances.

5. Although ESL teachers must be knowledgeable about the academic language across disciplines, they are not expected to be multidisciplinary (Walquí 2014)³. The ESL teacher cannot be expected to be an expert in all content areas and the full range of their corresponding content-specific academic language practices, just as SEI teachers are not expected to teach the full range of English language development subject matter. Therefore, the ESL teacher should focus on the academic language, academic habits of thinking (i.e. use evidence to support claims, question evidence, etc.), and power standards that cut across all content areas.

6. ESL teachers, in collaboration with other content teachers, should continue to develop awareness of the language ELLs need to be able to process and produce in mainstream classes to reach high levels of performance. Likewise, general education teachers need to develop awareness and strategies to support the disciplinary language needs of ELL students. The language development of ELL students is the responsibility of both ESL and general education teachers.

7. Gaining proficiency in the academic language of American schools requires more than linguistic knowledge. Teachers, therefore, must also consider cultural knowledge and ways of being, interacting, negotiating, speaking, listening, reading, and writing as connected to cultural and social roles.

8. Considerations must be made for **special populations** (examples: newcomers, SLIFE, SPED, long-term ELLs, gifted, etc.)

Newcomers: “for students at the earliest levels of English language proficiency, curricula must clearly be different. They should ... move students as quickly as possible forward and toward the analytical tasks that are inside of our standards and outlined in the frameworks...” (Kibler 2014). Furthermore, for students who are just beginning to learn a language, everyday language becomes the basis for academic language. However, teachers must simultaneously guide students towards the skills, knowledge, and academic habits of thinking embedded in the Frameworks. Language forms and functions should still be taught in a contextualized, rich, and meaningful manner. *Please see separate guidance for SLIFE and students with disabilities.*

ASSESSMENTS:

9. ESL uses multiple forms of assessment to gather evidence of students’ achievement towards standards that focus on speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Any other content (science, math, social studies, etc.) that becomes part of a language assessment is incidental, and purely provides the context for language development. For example, a teacher who holds an ESL license can design assessments that measure the academic *language* of the content areas, but should not assess the *content* of science, math, ELA, or other areas that require their own licenses.

¹ WIDA standard 1: Social and Instructional Language.

² Although research on academic language for ELLs in K-12 settings is incomplete, for the purposes of our context we are defining academic language as the language one needs to succeed in general education classrooms. For “A Review of the Literature on Academic English: Implications for K-12 English Language Learners,” see http://www.ceee.gwu.edu/Academic%20Lit%20Review_FINAL.pdf.

³ TESOL Webinar: Changes in the Expertise of ESL Professionals in the Era of New Standards,” with Guadalupe Valdés, Amanda K. Kibler, and Aída Walqui., June 19, 2014

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