The Math Must-Haves

Selecting Math Curriculum that Delivers for Emergent Bilingual Students

ENGLISH LEARNERS SUCCESS FORUM

Why This Matters

- Education leaders recognize the value of high-quality instructional materials, but many struggle to define or identify them, according to a recent Gallup poll.
- Four out of five teachers say their current materials don't adequately support multilingual learners.
- District leaders face a complex process to adopt materials that truly support teachers in meeting the needs of all students, including multilingual learners.

The choices made around materials adoption are the most direct lever districts have to drive access, raise achievement, and fulfill a vision where every student, regardless of language background, can access rigorous, meaningful math in English and their home language.

That's why ELSF has identified the **Math Must-Haves**: three non-negotiable features every math curriculum must include to truly serve all students, especially multilingual learners (MLLs).

What to Ask: Ensuring High-Impact Adoption

When reviewing materials or shaping your RFP, insist on:

- Mapping of both math concepts and language demands across every grade.
- Robust, actionable teacher supports for monitoring student growth, language, and math.
- Meaningful, sustained structures for student-to-student math conversation, not just standalone activities.

These are not just compliance checks; they are the backbone of access-driven, research-validated materials that deliver real results for every classroom.

The Payoff: Measurable Gains for Districts

Selecting Math Must-Haves brings measurable advantages:

- Educators gain clear, research-backed tools to differentiate instruction for diverse classrooms.
- Districts close persistent opportunity gaps, raising the percentage of MLLs reaching proficiency and readiness for college and careers.
- All students, regardless of first language, can confidently analyze, justify, and communicate their math reasoning.

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The 3 Math Must-Haves for MLL Success

Must-Have 1
Mapping Math and Language Development

High-quality materials align essential math concepts and disciplinary language, progressing from everyday to precise academic vocabulary across grade levels.

- **Look for:** Explicit links between math ideas and language, supports for all four communication modes (speaking, listening, reading, writing), and guidance on how language demands grow as concepts deepen.
- **Impact:** Mapping supports teachers in transitioning MLLs from conversational to academic math language, enhancing both conceptual understanding and test performance.
- **Question to ask:** How does disciplinary language develop across the unit, in support of understanding of key mathematical ideas?

Must-Have 2
Monitoring Math and Language Development

Curricula must empower teachers to assess both math reasoning and use of academic language, and to provide targeted feedback.

- **Look for:** Tasks that ask students to explain thinking using math language, clear success criteria, and actionable "look-fors" to track growth and adjust instruction.
- **Impact:** Monitoring strengthens the connection between math mastery and language development, resulting in tangible student gains. Districts using MLL-focused tools report higher rates of progress monitoring for both math and English growth.
- **Question to ask:** How are teachers equipped to provide actionable feedback to students so both can make teaching/learning decisions to advance disciplinary language development?

Must-Have 3
Making Connections Through Collaboration and Conversation

Materials must provide routines that structure peer-to-peer and whole-class math discourse.

- **Look for:** Built-in student talk prompts, activities requiring justification and peer feedback, and multimodal tasks (oral, written, visual).
- **Impact:** Well-designed collaborative activities accelerate the acquisition of academic language and deep conceptual understanding.
- **Question to ask:** What opportunities do students have to build and refine their mathematics ideas and language through clarifying, justifying, borrowing language/ideas from peers?