

The ELA Must-Haves

Selecting English Language Arts (ELA) Curriculum that Delivers for Multilingual Learners



Materials adoption choices are the most direct lever districts have to drive equity, raise achievement, and ensure every student, regardless of language background, accesses rigorous, meaningful literacy instruction in English and their home language.

That's why ELSF identified the ELA Must-Haves: three non-negotiable product features that every ELA curriculum must include to truly serve all students, especially multilingual learners (MLLs). These are not just compliance checks; they are the backbone of equity-driven, research-validated materials that deliver real results for every classroom.

Why This Matters

- [Four out of five teachers](#) say their current ELA materials don't adequately support MLLs.
- Without a shared definition of quality that explicitly includes MLLs, district leaders struggle to adopt materials that enable teachers to meet the needs of all students.

What to Ask: Ensuring High-Impact Adoption

When reviewing materials or shaping your RFP, insist on:

- Mapping of both content knowledge and language demands of the texts and tasks across every grade.
- Robust, actionable guidance for teachers to monitor language development, in addition to content understanding.
- Meaningful, sustained structures for student-to-student collaboration to develop oral language and comprehension.

The Payoff: Measurable Gains for Districts

Selecting materials that include the ELA Must-Haves brings [measurable advantages](#):

- Educators gain clear, research-backed tools to differentiate instruction for diverse classrooms.
- Districts close opportunity gaps, increasing the percentage of MLLs who reach proficiency and are ready for college and careers.
- All students, regardless of home language, can confidently analyze texts, construct arguments, and communicate ideas through writing and discussion.

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The 3 ELA Must-Haves for MLL Success



Must-Have 1 Mapping Content and Language Development

High-quality materials align content knowledge and disciplinary language, spiraling language functions and features across the program so students build the language they need to access texts and complete tasks.

- **Look for:** A unit-level map or scope and sequence linking content knowledge to language development, showing how language demands grow with text complexity to support content learning.
- **Impact:** Mapping language and content over time ensures MLL support is integrated into content learning, not an add-on.
- **Question to ask:** How does disciplinary language develop across the unit, in support of understanding of core texts and key ideas?



Must-Have 2 Monitoring Content and Language Development

Curricula must empower teachers to assess both literacy development and language development, and to provide targeted feedback.

- **Look for:** Formative and summative assessments that include clear success criteria for both language and content with actionable "look-fors" and next steps to track growth and adjust instruction.
- **Impact:** Monitoring strengthens the connection between content understanding and language development, resulting in tangible student gains.
- **Question to ask:** How do formative and summative assessments support both language and literacy development, and provide next steps to adjust instruction?



Must-Have 3 Making Connections Through Student Collaboration and Conversation

Oral language and literacy routines allow students to build ideas and refine language by clarifying, elaborating, and borrowing language and ideas from their peers as they read, write, and discuss texts.

- **Look for:** Structured oral language and literacy routines (e.g., stronger and clearer, Socratic seminar, think-pair-share/write) that facilitate purposeful discussions, multiple structured peer exchanges per lesson, and explicit guidance for facilitating equitable discourse.
- **Impact:** Sustained peer discourse scaffolds learning, offers formative assessment opportunities, and helps students internalize and practice language while deepening their understanding of texts.
- **Question to ask:** How do materials structure opportunities for students to build on, question, and refine each other's ideas and language use around core texts and tasks?