



When Spanish Language Arts Materials Fall Short

An If-Then Guide for District Leaders

Many Spanish Language Arts (SLA) programs are translated or adapted from materials originally designed for English Language Arts. Even when accurate, these materials may not fully reflect how Spanish language and literacy develop or build on students' linguistic, cultural, and bilingual assets. High-quality, authentic Spanish texts are non-negotiable because they provide strong language models, reflect diverse cultures and varieties of Spanish, and support meaningful literacy and language development.

The **English Learners Success Forum (ELSF) Spanish Language Arts Benchmarks of Quality (BoQs)** provide districts and state education agencies with a research-grounded framework for identifying high-quality SLA materials and recognizing critical gaps in existing offerings. Grounded in the BoQs, this two-page resource highlights common gaps and helps leaders determine whether they are best addressed through targeted improvement, capacity building, or deeper curriculum design.

Action Pathways

Not every gap requires the same type of response. Use these pathways to gauge the scope of action that may be needed. The pathways are not mutually exclusive and may be combined based on the specific needs and context.

DISTRICT-LED ACTION District teams supplement or strengthen specific components using existing expertise, resources, and processes.	CAPACITY BUILDING District teams strengthen educator knowledge, instructional guidance, and shared practices so improvements can be implemented consistently.	STRATEGIC EXPERT PARTNERSHIP District teams work with specialized expertise to redesign or systematically strengthen curriculum, language development, or assessment components.
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Common Gaps and Recommended Responses

Use the following If-Then guidance to identify common weaknesses in SLA materials and consider appropriate next steps.

If...	Then...	Look for / Consider...
Core texts are primarily translations or do not provide strong models of authentic Spanish discourse and its varieties.	Supplement or replace priority texts with high-quality, grade-appropriate texts originally written in Spanish. Alternatively, revise associated instruction as needed to preserve unit knowledge and learning goals.	DISTRICT-LED ACTION Prioritize the anchor and supplemental texts that drive the most instruction. Consider linguistic authenticity, complexity, cultural representation, and alignment to unit goals.
Language objectives are generic, inconsistent, or disconnected from the Spanish language	Identify the specific language demands found in anchor texts and make those expectations explicit in instruction.	CAPACITY BUILDING Strengthen shared understanding of effective language objectives across listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Move beyond broad objectives such as “use

demands of lesson and unit tasks.		academic vocabulary” and identify the specific language students need to successfully engage with texts and tasks.
Foundational skills instruction mirrors English literacy development, is taught in isolation, and/or is disconnected from the texts students read.	Strengthen instruction to reflect how literacy develops in Spanish and connect foundational skills practice to texts used in the lessons/units.	STRATEGIC EXPERT PARTNERSHIP Examine whether the sequence reflects Spanish orthography and literacy development – including decoding, syllabification, fluency, morphology, spelling, and accentuation – and whether students apply these skills in connected text.
Students have limited opportunities for sustained oral language and academic discourse.	Create purposeful, recurring opportunities for students to engage in language play, oral traditions, and academic conversation as they discuss, explain, narrate, and elaborate ideas in Spanish.	DISTRICT-LED ACTION Examine whether lessons incorporate songs, riddles, refranes, trabalenguas, storytelling, recitation, and wordplay connected to lesson and unit themes. Strengthen interactive read-alouds, structured conversations, collaborative meaning-making, and other routines that use oral language to advance literacy and content learning.
Language instruction focuses primarily on vocabulary.	Expand language development to include meaningful attention to how Spanish works in the text—at the word, phrase, sentence, and discourse levels.	STRATEGIC EXPERT PARTNERSHIP Identify high-leverage morphological, syntactic, grammatical, and discourse features embedded in the texts and tasks students encounter rather than adding disconnected single-word language exercises.
Cross-linguistic connections are limited to cognates or occasional vocabulary comparisons.	Create purposeful opportunities for students to analyze similarities and differences across languages at the word, sentence, and discourse levels.	CAPACITY BUILDING Extend comparisons beyond vocabulary to relevant features of morphology, syntax, phonology and orthography, semantics, and discourse. Leverage students’ linguistic knowledge without positioning English as the default reference point.
Assessments are translated from English without sufficient consideration of the structures of the Spanish language and the development of literacy in Spanish.	Review assessments for linguistic authenticity, alignment to instruction, and their ability to accurately capture what students know and can do in Spanish.	STRATEGIC EXPERT PARTNERSHIP Examine standards, source texts, prompts, language demands, response modes, and scoring criteria. Consider when content knowledge and Spanish language performance should be evaluated together or separately.

Deciding What to Address and How

Districts should not have to rebuild an SLA curriculum from the ground up or expect individual teachers to compensate for limitations in purchased materials on their own.

Once gaps are identified, leaders can prioritize and determine whether the most appropriate response is a district-led improvement, an investment in capacity building, or a strategic design partnership for deeper curriculum work with experts in the field.