

Critical Conditions for English Learners in Distance Learning

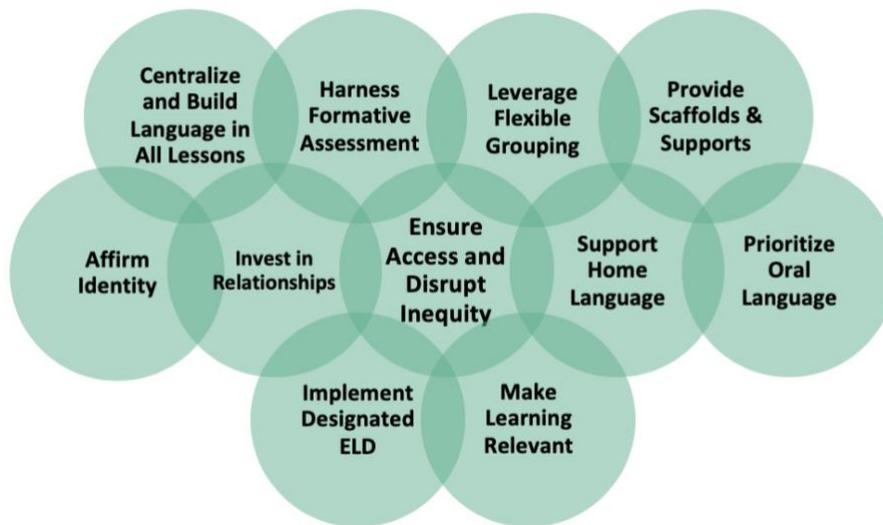
by Laurie Olsen, Jennifer Diehl and Charice Guerra



ELRISE!

ENGLISH LEARNER ROADMAP IMPLEMENTATION
FOR SYSTEMIC EXCELLENCE

Meeting the needs of English learners in distance learning **requires** attention to critical conditions that together support and engage this student group in a schooling experience that builds language, provides access to the curriculum, connects students to their peers and to relevant learning, embraces their participation and honors their identities. These Critical Conditions for English Learners in Distance Learning are based upon decades of research on effective practices for English learners and are a response to the charge to implement California’s comprehensive [English Learner Roadmap](#) policy amidst the challenges of a pandemic. As teachers and students alike face the unprecedented unpredictability of teaching and learning through shifting structures, locations, and mixtures of distance and “brick and mortar” schooling dictated by health concerns, it is our hope that these Critical Conditions provide some guidance and grounding for planning supportive and appropriate instruction for this vulnerable and often marginalized population.



CALIFORNIA ENGLISH LEARNER ROADMAP - FOUR INTERRELATED PRINCIPLES

Four principles support the vision and provide the foundation of the California English Learner Roadmap. These principles are intended to guide all levels of the system towards a coherent and aligned set of practices, services, relationships, and approaches to teaching and learning that together create a powerful, effective, 21st-century education for our English learners. Underlying this systemic application of the Principles is the foundational understanding that simultaneously developing English learners’ linguistic and academic capacities is a shared responsibility of all educators. To that end, all levels of the schooling system have a role to play in ensuring the access and achievement of the 1.2 million English learners who attend our schools.

- ▶ **Principle One: Assets-Oriented and Needs-Responsive Schools**
- ▶ **Principle Two: Intellectual Quality of Instruction and Meaningful Access**
- ▶ **Principle Three: System Conditions to Support Effectiveness**
- ▶ **Principle Four: Alignment and Articulation within and Across Systems**

These Principles and elements that follow are research and values-based and build upon the California ELA/ELD Framework, Blueprint for Great Schools 1.0 and 2.0, and other state policy and guidance documents. It is important to stress that these principles and elements are not meant to serve as a checklist. Rather, they could be thought of as the keys of an instrument, from which harmony and music are created. In that sense, districts are the musicians and ultimately must take responsibility for choices and implementation.

1. Invest in Relationships and Build Community

Education involves the whole person. Academic competence can only develop with attention to social and emotional needs, in a respectful and supportive environment. Students learn in and through relationships (*student:teacher, student:student, student:family, teacher:family*); humans thrive in community with one another. If children are to learn, schooling must begin by creating affirming, safe, inclusive communities in which meaningful engagement, collaboration and interaction are hallmarks. Furthermore, language develops most powerfully in such a context, where it has meaning and a purpose.

► English Learner Roadmap Principle One

Implications for Distance Learning Context:

- Prioritize personal connection and building community at the start of the school year, and *continue* to emphasize this aspect of schooling throughout the year.
- Make time for intentional community building in virtual spaces, related to interpersonal, social and community issues as well as academic content.
- Provide structures, activities, and support for students to collaborate with their peers in synchronous and asynchronous settings. Emphasize norms, expectations, and skills of collaboration, prioritizing process over product.
- Develop big and little buddy opportunities that can occur outside whole classroom virtual gatherings.
- Ensure synchronous learning incorporates elements of togetherness - sharing with one another, thinking together, and learning from one another.
- Actively seek to lower anxieties regarding the use of new technology and regarding expectations for independent work done in home setting, particularly at the start of year.
- Establish effective and flexible two-way communication mechanisms with families for information flow, feedback, and to build relationships.

Strategies & Practices:

- [Family/Empathy Interview](#)
- [Community Meetings, Community Circles](#)
- [Restorative Justice](#)
- [Collaborative Practice](#)
- [Mindfulness Activities](#)
- Big/Little Buddies
- [Regular Family-School Communication](#)
- Technology Training for Families
- [Strategy Workshops for Families](#)

2. Affirm Identity

Schooling should be assets-oriented, embracing the experiences, languages, and cultures of students (and their families) as assets for their own learning, and as important contributions to the learning community overall. These intersectional identities should be valued, honored, and built upon in culturally sustaining activities through active messaging, thoughtfully inclusive curriculum, and the use of culturally relevant resources and materials.

► English Learner Roadmap Principles One & Two

Implications for Distance Learning Context:

- Seize every opportunity to involve family members in the child's education through clear home-school connection activities and with scaffolded support for family engagement.
- Create lessons that require students to draw upon and incorporate their identities and experiences.
- Seek online multilingual, multicultural resources that reflect students' lives and experiences which can be used for assignments.
- Actively voice messages of support for diversity and anti-bias.
- Avoid making assumptions about students' home life and engagement.
- Ask questions and invite personal experience into the virtual space.

Strategies & Practices:

- [Home-School Connections](#)
- [Identity Expression Activities](#)
- [Language Exposure/Language Diversity](#)
- [Literature that provides "Mirrors & Windows"](#)
- [TK-3rd Literature that provides "Mirrors & Windows"](#)
- [4th - 6th Literature that provides "Mirrors & Windows"](#)
- [Family/Empathy Interview](#)

3. Support Home Language

English learners are dual language beings with home language(s) in which knowledge and culture are encoded, and with language proficiency that can be built upon in learning English. For dual language learners, making cross-language connections strengthens overall language proficiency and literacy in *both* languages. In addition, the presence of home language in school enhances “belonging” and affirms students’ identity. With the benefits of bilingualism and developing biliteracy, school systems need to plan for a biliteracy trajectory that implements research-based dual language program models. This trajectory towards biliteracy should be assessed and monitored, with the attainment of benchmarks celebrated along the way towards achieving the [State Seal of Biliteracy](#) upon graduation.

► English Learner Roadmap Principle One & Two

Implications for Distance Learning Context:

In English-taught instruction:

- Identify and make available online resources in the home languages of the students that are related to academic content.
- Create opportunities for small group discussions in home-language alike groupings
- Engage students in working with the family to discover cognates for academic vocabulary they are learning.
- Leverage “home learning” time to engage students in projects using home language with families.
- Communicate with families about the importance of home language, and share online home-language resources with them.

In dual language instruction:

- Utilize whole group time for immersive instruction in the Target language.
- Use the internet to connect in project-based collaboration with speakers of the Target language in other nations and cultures.
- Access courses and reference materials in the Target language from across the globe.

Strategies & Practices:

- [Cognate Walls](#)
- Offer Language Choice
- [Language Exposure/Language Diversity](#)
- [Vocabulary in Context](#)
- [Home-School Connections](#)
- [Provide pathways to the Seal of Biliteracy](#)

4. Make Learning Relevant

Motivation and engagement are essential conditions for learning. Activities must be purposeful, authentic, and relevant to students' interests, everyday life, and current events. Invite and support students to make connections between grade-level academic topics and their prior knowledge and lived experiences. Promote autonomy and agency through choice and challenging tasks with scaffolds for success.

► English Learner Roadmap Principle One & Two

Implications for Distance Learning Context:

- Eliminate decontextualized worksheets based on rote practice.
- Connect lessons to current events and the students' everyday life considering what matters most right now.
- Offer project-based learning that allows students to engage with their environment.
- Leverage opportunities of home-based learning through assignments that connect students to family.
- Provide choices of topics and texts, including a choice of language.
- Collaborate with families throughout the year to set relevant academic and socio-emotional goals. Provide feedback on progress to families regularly.

Strategies & Practices:

- [Family Goal-Setting Interview](#)
- [Shared Research Projects](#)
- [Inquiry Chart](#)
- [Guiding Question](#)
- [Observation Pictures & Research Rotations](#)
- [Home-School Connections](#)
- [Language Through the Arts](#)
- [Social Action Projects](#)

5. Centralize and Build Language in All Lessons

Language develops most powerfully in the context of building knowledge about something and interacting with the world. Educators need to strategically attend to the language structures, as well as the vocabulary of the discipline. This includes providing an explicit focus on complex, precise, rich and academic language in every lesson. While important for all students, this intentional emphasis on language learning in and through content is particularly critical for English learners who are developing proficiency in a new language. In elementary schools, teaching thematically creates opportunities to connect learning through an interdisciplinary, integrated approach.

► English Learner Roadmap Principle Two

Implications for Distance Learning Context:

- Make explicit the language objectives for each lesson by providing resources such as vocabulary banks, sentence frames, and question stems that aid students in synthesizing content in tandem with language.
- Pay attention to English language structures required for participation and comprehension, and intentionally support and scaffold English learners in noticing and practicing them.

Strategies:

- [Language Function Wall](#)
- [Focus Wall](#)
- [Vocabulary in Context](#)
- [Frayer Model](#)
- [Graphic Organizers](#)
- [Draw and Label](#)
- [Narrative Input](#)
- [Dialogic Read Aloud](#)

6. Prioritize Oral Language

Oral language is the foundation for literacy, and the essential linchpin in developing proficiency in a new language. In order to develop language, students must actively use and produce language through speaking and writing. A language rich classroom is characterized by more student talk than teacher talk.

► English Learner Roadmap Principle Two

Implications for Distance Learning Context:

- Seize every opportunity for oral language production during synchronous instruction.
- Actively seek ways to embed oral language into activities.
- Record yourself singing songs and chants so students can sing and chant along.
- Utilize small group formats for dialogue, reinforcing norms of productive discourse.
- Provide opportunities for students to record digital oral presentations.
- Develop collaborative or shared writing opportunities.
- Engage in 1:1 conversations with English learners regularly
- Provide increasingly complex frames for students' responses to build proficiency with new structures and vocabulary.
- Extend lessons by creating multiple opportunities for students to practice new vocabulary and language structures in subsequent activities.

Strategies & Practices:

- [Five Exchange Conversation](#)
- Sentence frames/starters
- Language/word banks
- [Chants, Songs & Poems](#)
- [Think-Pair-Share](#)
- [Choral Response](#)
- Oral Presentations
- [Discussion Protocols](#)
- [Collaborative Practice](#)
- Voice Memo or [Flip Grid](#) to capture oral responses

7. Provide Scaffolds and Supports

In order for English learners to comprehend instruction and actively participate in the full curriculum, teachers must intentionally use differentiated supports such as visuals, graphic organizers, multiple forms of representation, and clear modeling. Creating predictable learning routines and offering multiple opportunities and modes to learn and review content also supports English learners. When planning, educators must incorporate ELD standards and appropriate English learner supportive practices into all content areas (Integrated ELD), differentiating by proficiency levels and based on student need.

► English Learner Roadmap Principle Two

Implications for Distance Learning Context:

- Use small groups to differentiate instruction and provide supports.
- Follow the same weekly and daily routines, and provide a visual schedule of the week's lessons for students and families to follow along.
- Send/mail graphic organizers and differentiated sentence frames that can be used during lessons.
- Engage students in synthesizing their learning using Academic Process Journals during synchronous and asynchronous lessons.
- Utilize online video and photographic resources to make content visual and comprehensible.
- Make available resource materials in the home language that students and their families can use for reference.
- Recognize the diversity of need among English learners, including the particular needs of newcomers for cultural orientation and support.

Strategies & Practices:

- [Academic Process Journal](#)
- [Narrative Input](#)
- [Dialogic Read Aloud](#)
- [Draw and Label](#)
- Read Alouds
- [TK-3rd Graphic Organizers with Sentence Frames](#)
- [4th -6th Graphic Organizers with Sentence Frames](#)
- Visuals & Realia

8. Harness Formative Assessment

When planning for instruction, educators must determine the learning goals and success criteria for the unit or lesson prior to lesson design. These are the foundation for formative assessments. These assessment opportunities should be varied in format and frequency to inform instruction and feedback. Educators can monitor student progress by assessing cognitive, metacognitive, and affective processes, and students should also have the opportunity to self-reflect. All of these forms of feedback provide for a holistic view of the students' learning. Without formative assessment, educators will be unable to provide targeted instruction and scaffolds for English learners, nor will they effectively distinguish between language needs and content/skill needs.

► English Learner Roadmap Principle Two, Three, and Four

Implications for Distance Learning Context:

- Harness the opportunity to understand how to assess student learning in the virtual space.
- Include multiple checks for comprehension throughout lessons tapping into technology tools and meeting with heterogeneous and homogeneous small groups to effectively gauge understanding.
- Provide weekly check-in opportunities for students to monitor their socio-emotional well being.
- Plan with colleagues to choose the mode of instruction (synchronous/asynchronous, platforms, and tools) after determining the goals and outcomes for learning.
- Provide different forms of output for students to demonstrate learning/growth.
- Think outside the box. Take opportunities to co-teach and share students in the virtual space, leveraging the ability to create coherent groups by student need.
- Plan small group instruction based upon results of formative assessment.

Strategies & Practices:

- [TK-3rd Graphic Organizers with Sentence Frames](#)
- [4th -6th Graphic Organizers with Sentence Frames](#)
- [Oral Language Analysis \(OLA\)](#)
- [Think-Pair-Share](#)
- Exit Tickets
- Voice Memo or [flipgrid](#) to capture oral responses
- [Academic Process Journal](#)

9. Leverage Flexible Grouping

Distance learning provides an unique opportunity for varied and flexible grouping, removing the challenge of classroom management. The teacher can schedule specific time to meet with a small group online, while others are engaged in independent work at home. In order for the small groups to be successful, deliberate planning for individual and group activities must happen. This includes teaching structures for student collaboration to engage in pair or small groups and selecting platforms that allow students to comment, discuss, and edit each other's work. It is through small group sessions that the teacher is able to deliver targeted instruction, including Designated ELD focused on specific needs of English learner students. (See Critical Condition #10: Implement Designated ELD.)

► **English Learner Roadmap Principle Two, Three, Four**

Implications for Distance Learning Context:

- Develop understanding of tools/apps/services that allow for student collaboration.
- Provide instruction on how to use tools/apps/services for students and families.
- Include English learners in small groups that are not based in proficiency level for integrated ELD to have opportunities to interact with English models
- Reserve regular time slots each week to work with small groups as the need arises.

10. Implement Designated ELD

English learners need **daily** Designated ELD. Designated and Integrated ELD have a symbiotic relationship in the development of language: Designated ELD provides targeted instruction addressing English learners' proficiency levels and language needs based on formative assessment; Integrated ELD addresses language development within academic disciplinary contexts related to the academic tasks and content. The [California ELD Standards](#) call for instruction designed to “*interact in meaningful ways*” through collaborative modes (engagement in dialogue with others), interpretive modes (comprehension and analysis of written and spoken text), and productive modes (creation of oral presentations and written text) while “*learning about how English works.*” In addition, teachers must leverage home language foundational skills to develop English proficiency. Educators must design Designated ELD to support access to the content and ensure English learners to develop the English language needed to comprehend and participate. (See these [videos](#) for more information about Integrated and Designated ELD.)

► **English Learner Roadmap Principle One, Two, Three, Four**

Implications for Distance Learning Context:

- Provide daily instruction in small homogeneous groups, based on language proficiency, to address the ELD Standards, related to the regular content.
- Design Designated ELD lessons “to prepare students for” whole class instruction and/or “to respond to” language needs based on observation and formative assessment.
- Provide opportunities in a distance learning space for English learners to engage in collaborative, interpretive, and productive tasks.
- Develop asynchronous and synchronous options for learning about how English works.
- Partner with colleagues to co-teach and share students based on learning needs.
- Call students who may not have access to the internet to support Designated ELD.
- Communicate the importance of Designated ELD and develop a schedule with families.

11. Ensure Access and Disrupt Inequity

For far too long, English learners have been viewed as deficient and lacking, rather than having their assets valued, honored, and leveraged. To address equal educational opportunity and disrupt patterns of oppression, schools must eliminate barriers related to language and provide English learners with access to the full curriculum. This commitment extends to Distance Learning contexts, where English learner populations are at risk of being further marginalized. In addition, school systems are the vehicle for providing nutrition support and meals, and serve as a key provider of resources and referral to essential basic services for families. These safety nets are necessary to meet the basic needs of students and their families. Distance Learning complicates these issues and creates new dangers of inequity related to access to technology, materials, and support.

► English Learner Roadmap Principle One, Three, Four

Implications for Distance Learning Context:

- Avoid narrowing the curriculum to just reading and math. Be sure English learners are receiving access to the full grade level standards curriculum.
- Boost synchronous learning time allowing English learners to receive the maximum teaching time available.
- Provide primary language curriculum and supports on students' devices.
- Provide access to a device and work with local internet providers to ensure access to families.
- Select with app/services to provide products in students' primary language whenever possible.
- Collect feedback regarding the usability of apps/services for students and families.
- Consider what students can do without family support, and remember that some children may be caring for younger siblings at home.
- Monitor participation and attendance. Proactively connect with English learners and their families to find flexible solutions to support their participation.

EL RISE! (**English Learner Roadmap Implementation for Systemic Excellence**) is a collaboration between Californians Together, SEAL (Sobrato Early Academic Language) and Loyola Marymount University's Center for Equity for English Learners, funded through an Educator Workforce Investment Grant from the California Department of Education to support statewide implementation of the visionary and comprehensive 2017 CA English Learner Roadmap State Board of Education policy. The goals of EL RISE! are:

- Strengthen the **capacity** of County Offices of Education to support LEAs in planning, professional learning, and continuous improvement processes to centralize and meet the needs of their English learners in alignment with the EL Roadmap;
- Increase educators' **knowledge** of the EL Roadmap and research-based practices for English learners, and **understanding** of the implications for multiple roles and levels of the system
- Build **skills and strategies** for implementing Roadmap-aligned evidence-based practices
- Facilitate the development of **shared vision and priorities for local plans** and implementation of the EL Roadmap leading to greater coherence
- Support the **design, improvement** and sustainability of strong research-based **language acquisition** programs and services for English learners, including dual language programs
- Develop **local policies** and LEA **system mechanisms** focused on English learner needs and aligned to the EL Roadmap