

# High-Quality Instructional Framework for MLLs to Thrive

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BLUEPRINT FOR MLL SUCCESS

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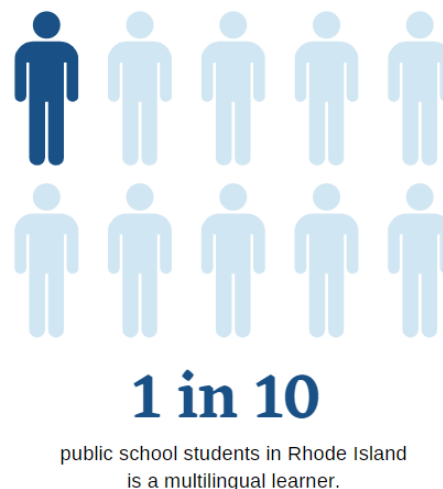
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## Introduction

All multilingual learners (MLLs)<sup>1</sup> come to our classrooms with tremendous cultural, linguistic, and intellectual resources, along with the right to high-quality education. Our educational systems are responsible for supporting MLLs in cultivating these strengths through integrated content and language instruction, enrichment opportunities, and a whole-child approach to teaching and learning.

In the present framework, RIDE aims to establish key components of high-quality core instruction<sup>2</sup> and offer resources to support implementation in Rhode Island. Such support is needed now more than ever. From 2010 to 2020, our MLL student population in Rhode Island doubled, both in terms of student count and as a share of the general K-12 population—and this demographic only continues to grow. In 2020, 11% of Rhode Island public school students were designated as *Current MLLs*, meaning they qualified for language services to access basic educational programs.



## Shared Ownership

Many practitioners see the instruction of MLLs as the responsibility of English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Bilingual/Dual Language (BDL) teachers. Yet, this view is misguided and has led to grossly inequitable outcomes for our MLLs. In reality, MLLs often have multiple teachers of record and multiple school and district leaders who directly shape their educational experiences. **All** educators share ownership over MLL instruction—from teachers and building administrators to district personnel, state administrators, program providers, paraprofessionals, and other school-based staff.

To foster a culture of collaboration and shared ownership, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) convened stakeholders in 2020 to create Rhode Island’s *Blueprint for MLL Success*. During *Blueprint for MLL Success* development, stakeholders at all levels of the educational system, including parents, students, and community advocates, came together around a common vision. This vision reflects the hopes of Rhode Island’s community—what we aspire to and are committed to achieving in MLL education across the state:

## Vision for MLL Success

*All multilingual learners in the state of Rhode Island are empowered with high-quality instructional opportunities, including multilingual education, that leverage their cultural and linguistic assets, promote college and career readiness, and prepare them to thrive socially, politically, and economically, both in our state and globally.*

<sup>1</sup> RIDE uses *multilingual learners (MLLs)* to refer to the same population in federal policy as English learners (ELs). This term reflects the agency’s asset-based view of students who come to Rhode Island schools with broad linguistic repertoires. For a full list of MLL definitions, please see Rhode Island’s [Strategic Plan for MLL Success](#).

<sup>2</sup> Under a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), *core* refers to grade-level Tier I instruction provided to all students, including diverse learners. Effective core instruction is based on high-quality curricula and evidence-based instructional practices. To learn more and access free professional learning, visit BRIDGE-RI: <https://mtssri.org/>

Through *Lau v. Nichols*, *Castañeda v. Pickard*, and the Equal Educational Opportunity Act, the federal government has affirmed the responsibility of educational agencies in guaranteeing MLLs linguistic access to instructional opportunities. As a matter of civil rights, local educational agencies (LEAs) must provide instruction and services that allow MLLs to participate meaningfully in basic educational programs.

## Purpose of Framework

The *High-Quality Instructional Framework for MLLs to Thrive* outlines requirements for MLL service provision and sets the bar for MLL instruction across the state. In the aim of developing a common understanding of high-quality core instruction for MLLs, the central questions addressed by the present framework are as follows.

## Driving Questions




- What instructional practices has research shown to be effective with MLLs?
- What services are non-negotiable when it comes to guaranteeing MLLs meaningful access to basic educational programs?


This work represents one of the first major implementation initiatives of the *Blueprint for MLL Success*, as described in Goal 1 of the *Strategic Plan for MLL Success*. This work is also aligned to RIDE’s priorities of *Equity* and *Excellence in Learning* as articulated in [Rhode Island's Strategic Plan for PK-12 Education, 2021-2025](#) as well as WIDA’s Big Ideas from the [2020 Edition of the WIDA ELD Standards Framework](#), particularly *Equity* and *Integration*.

## Target Audience

The target audience for this framework is **all** educators and administrators in Rhode Island. Regardless of certification area or work assignment, all educators in Rhode Island will likely teach or influence the education of MLLs at some point in their career. The evidence-based components of MLL instruction laid out in this framework are intended to guide educators in their local MLL program design and implementation of core curricula, intervention services, and enrichment activities for MLLs.

Target Audience	Recommended Use of Framework	Intended Outcome
Early Childhood, Elementary, Middle and High School Educators (All Certification Areas)	<p><i>Integrate evidence-based practices for MLLs into teaching &amp; learning</i></p> <p><i>Collaborate with colleagues during instructional planning to ensure cohesive goals are set for students’ content-driven language development</i></p> <p><i>Advocate for evidence-based instructional systems from school and district leaders</i></p>	<p><b>All educators will explicitly teach the language necessary to engage in content learning, simultaneously developing MLLs’ disciplinary and language practices. Integrated instruction will include regular progress monitoring of students’ content-driven language development, formative language feedback, and opportunities for students to engage in self- and peer-assessment.</b></p>

<p>Paraprofessionals</p>	<p><i>Support the simultaneous development of disciplinary language and content skills</i></p> <p><i>Sustain evidence-based instructional systems for MLLs, such as MTSS</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p><b>All MLL students will thrive in teaching &amp; learning environments that integrate content and language while respecting and sustaining their cultures.</b></p>
<p>School Building Administrators</p>	<p><i>Establish schedules with ample time for structured collaborative planning across grade levels and content/certification areas, and include school counselors, librarians, and other school staff in these efforts</i></p> <p><i>Provide robust supports for all educators, such as professional learning, structures for collaborative planning, and coaching linked to MLL-focused classroom walkthroughs</i></p>	<p><b>All staff will be better equipped and more prepared to effectively serve MLLs.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p><b>All MLL students will thrive in teaching &amp; learning environments that integrate content and language while respecting and sustaining their cultures.</b></p>
<p>LEA Administrators</p>	<p><i>Enhance programming for MLLs through data-based decision-making and regular progress monitoring of strategies identified in continuous improvement plans</i></p> <p><i>Provide targeted professional learning on evidence-based MLL instructional practices (e.g., offering a workshop on disciplinary language use in science to all secondary science educators in the district)</i></p>	<p><b>All LEA and SEA administrators will engage in evidence-based systems planning and continuous improvement for MLLs.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p><b>All MLL students will thrive in teaching &amp; learning environments that integrate content and language while respecting and sustaining their cultures.</b></p>
<p>SEA Administrators</p>	<p><i>Support LEA administrators in enacting high-quality instructional systems for MLLs with guidance, resources, professional learning, communities of practice, and implementation site visits</i></p>	
<p>Educator Preparation Program (EPP) Providers</p>	<p><i>Incorporate evidence-based practices for MLLs into syllabi and practices for all approved program areas</i></p> <p><i>Provide professional learning for faculty and instructors so all</i></p>	<p><b>All successful teacher and building administrator candidates will exhibit the competencies for teaching &amp; learning with MLLs in Rhode Island.</b></p>

	<i>share a common understanding of high-quality MLL instruction</i>	 <b>All MLL students will thrive in teaching &amp; learning environments that integrate content and language while respecting and sustaining their cultures.</b>
Teacher Candidates	<i>Enter Rhode Island schools ready to integrate evidence-based practices for MLLs into teaching &amp; learning and collaborate with colleagues in instructional planning</i>	
Building Administrator Candidates	<i>Enter Rhode Island schools ready to support the integration of evidence-based practices for MLLs into teaching and learning (e.g., through instructional coaching and the creation of cohesive systems)</i>	

**Part 1** of this framework outlines major elements of high-quality core instruction for MLLs. Critical components of Tier I instruction for MLLs within an MTSS framework include high-quality instructional practices, scaffolding, academic discourse, culturally responsive and sustaining education, and alignment to the WIDA English Language Development (ELD) Standards.

**Part 2** by contrast will establish the non-negotiables in Rhode Island for MLL program administration, implementation, and evaluation, in addition to describing effective collaborative teaching models and outlining key considerations for interventions with an MTSS framework.

## Part 1: Integrated Instruction

### High-Quality Instructional Practices

To promote equity and coherence in student learning across disciplines, RIDE has worked with stakeholders to identify five research-based practices central to high-quality instruction. Together, they form Rhode Island’s High-Quality Instructional Practices (HQIPs).

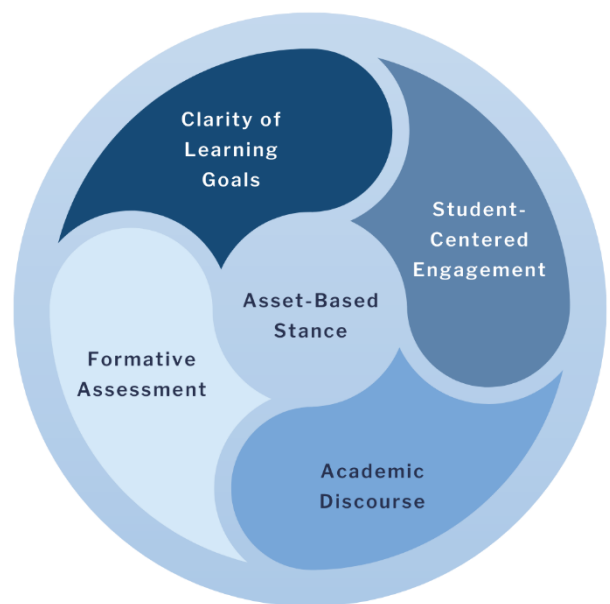
The HQIPs are foundational in RIDE’s content-based curriculum frameworks, which offer guidance about implementation of high-quality instructional materials and comprehensive assessment systems in each content area. For guidance about enacting the HQIPs within academic content instruction, please see RIDE’s [curriculum frameworks](#) in ELA, mathematics, and science.

RIDE developed the HQIPs by drawing on and synthesizing elements from the following resources: MLL instructional tenets drafted during *Blueprint for MLL Success* development, guiding principles for instruction in ELA and mathematics, the Council on Exceptional Children’s [High-Leverage Practices](#), as well as criteria in RIDE’s teacher evaluation system. Through these efforts to align, RIDE grounded the HQIPs in teaching that advances educational equity for MLLs and Differently-Abled Students (DAS).

The five HQIPs below articulate habits of teaching that are essential for MLLs—and all learners—to thrive. Within this framework, each HQIP comes with student-focused indicators that were developed to guide continuous improvement of MLL instruction and help facilitate student-focused coaching conversations. The indicators highlight habits of learning that are attainable through high-quality instruction.

The indicator statements place agency with students, whereas the HQIP statements focus on the role of the educator. This focus on students reflects the belief that high-quality instruction will foster student agency, particularly for MLLs. Within this framework, however, educators remain key architects of high-quality instructional opportunities, as those in the educational system closest to students and therefore perhaps best poised to empower students to realize the habits in the indicators.

The student-focused indicators offer one source of evidence as to whether educators are effectively implementing the HQIPs in classrooms with MLLs. Situating learning habits from students as look-for’s, or markers of high-quality instruction, opens the door to student-centered discussions in which educators consider the opportunities available to MLLs.



### Asset-Based Stance

*Teachers routinely leverage students’ strengths and assets by activating prior knowledge and connecting new learning to the culturally and linguistically diverse experiences of students while also respecting individual differences.*

**Indicators**

- Students use their home language(s) and communicative traditions<sup>3</sup> to learn content.
- Students position themselves as sources of knowledge during instruction by making connections to prior learning and familial and community experiences.
- Students welcome diverse perspectives and have structured opportunities to share aspects of their identities in the classroom.
- Students engage with culturally responsive and sustaining texts and participate in instructional activities that honor their lived experiences.<sup>4</sup>
- Students advocate for culturally responsive and sustaining education.

Through this HQIP, educators will draw on the linguistic and cultural resources of their students as springboards for new learning. Within MLL education, these linguistic and cultural resources are often referred to as students' **funds of knowledge**—a concept that emerged from research into the K-12 experiences of Mexican families in the United States. By affirming MLLs' funds of knowledge, educators can better harness prior knowledge for student learning. In order to leverage MLL students' and families' funds of knowledge, however, educators have to first know their students. Getting to know students and their families requires intentionality, sustained effort, and perhaps even protocols, such as surveying students and caregivers about related experiences before embarking on each new unit of study. Having such structures in place may prove especially helpful for educators who come from different cultural backgrounds than their students.

As shown in the HQIP image above, asset-oriented approaches to instruction transcend all other practices. When communicating learning goals, for example, educators must make connections to the cultural and linguistic experiences of students in order to effectively establish why students are learning the content or skill in question. Similar connections must be made to secure sustained student engagement and elicit student-driven academic discourse around high-interest topics. Relevant real-world connections and applications also matter when it comes to assessing student learning with validity and fairness.

**Clarity of Learning Goals**

*Teachers routinely use a variety of strategies to ensure that students understand the following: 1) What they are learning (and what proficient work looks like), 2) Why they are learning it (how it connects to what their own learning goals, what they have already learned and what they will learn), and 3) How they will know when they have learned it.*

**Indicators**

- Students develop explicit content-driven language practices within disciplinary learning environments.

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<sup>3</sup> Students come to Rhode Island classrooms with robust communicative traditions, not all of which are verbal in nature. Classroom practices should affirm and encourage the use of multimodal resources, such as gaze and gesture, in ways that honor and are responsive to students' cultural backgrounds.

<sup>4</sup> For additional information about how non-text-based instructional activities can be culturally responsive and sustaining, please see RIDE's [Culturally Responsive & Sustaining Education Review Tools](#) for High-Quality Curriculum Materials in Mathematics and ELA.



- Students demonstrate clear understanding of their goals for content and language learning, in alignment with grade-level standards.
- Students engage in contextualized language development focused on meaning-making and what students will use language to do.

Through this HQIP, educators will place the language necessary to engage in content learning front-and-center. Under ESSA, and as part of statewide shifts in practice stemming from the *Blueprint for MLL Success*, all educators with MLLs in their classes must articulate explicit language goals linked to disciplinary instruction, with students' rigorous content learning goals driving which language practices are taught. Clear language goals not only facilitate the language access necessary for MLLs to participate equitably in content instruction but also allow educators to embed academic language and literacy development into daily instruction.

Rather than crafting stand-alone language goals, educators should work to integrate language and content goals, teeing up opportunities for students to use the target language in rich content-based interactions and more meaningfully engage in grade-level disciplinary practices. Guidance around this HQIP reflects shifts in MLL pedagogy, particularly the move away from instruction that focuses on form (e.g., grammar rules) in isolation. It is also in line with the 2020 Edition of the WIDA ELD Standards Framework. For information about how to leverage the discipline-specific language functions from the 2020 Edition to establish content-driven language goals, please see the section on Alignment to the WIDA ELD Standards.

### Student-Centered Engagement

*Teachers routinely use techniques that are student-centered and foster high levels of engagement through individual and collaborative sense-making activities that promote practice, application in increasingly sophisticated settings and contexts, and metacognitive reflection.*

#### Indicators

- Students work productively through standards-aligned activities that promote higher order thinking (e.g., hypothesizing, synthesizing, evaluating).
- Students deconstruct rich grade-level texts in every class.
- Students participate in purposeful, deliberately sequenced tasks to build conceptual understanding and fluency with core disciplinary skills.
- Students make connections between disciplinary concepts and develop capacity to apply analytical reasoning to new situations.

Through this HQIP, educators will invite students to develop disciplinary knowledge and skills by setting up authentic opportunities for students to interact and demonstrate effective use of content-driven language practices at their grade level. Such activities should simultaneously increase MLLs' disciplinary understanding and access to robust language. Given the importance of disciplinary literacy under state-adopted content and ELD standards, it is critical that MLLs have exposure to and practice working with grade-level texts in every class daily.

All students learn through interaction, and there is strong evidence to support using **collaborative learning structures** with MLLs so as to provide clear roles, responsibilities, and rules for engagement. When facilitating peer-assisted learning, data-informed student groups stand to boost engagement. Heterogenous groups are particularly effective for peer-assisted core content learning, while homogeneous groups are effective in contexts where all students in the group require the same

targeted support (e.g. ELD services or Tier II interventions). For this reason, MLLs are often scheduled for ELD services in homogeneous classes according to English language proficiency (ELP) level. The overarching goal, however, is for MLLs to have access to equitable core grade-level content instruction in non-segregated classrooms. By strictly grouping students homogenously or creating modified assignments for MLLs in core instruction, educators may inadvertently establish low expectations and compromise the rigor of content learning, so flexible grouping and integrated instruction is recommended.

### Academic Discourse

*Teachers routinely facilitate and encourage student use of academic discourse through effective questioning and discussion techniques that foster rich peer-to-peer interactions and the integration of discipline-specific language into all aspects of learning.*

#### Indicators

- Students (co)construct knowledge by sustaining oral discussions and collaborative learning with discipline-specific discourse moves.
- Students grapple with open-ended questions and demonstrate voice and confidence in their spoken interactions.
- Students take part in content-based tasks that embed ample opportunities to authentically practice new academic language.

Through this HQIP, educators will facilitate open-ended inquiries and encourage students to probe high-interest topics on their path towards content proficiency. High-quality instructional materials often already embed rigorous discussion-based activities into the curriculum, but there are opportunities for educators to amplify and stretch existing materials so as to better attend to the cultural and linguistic needs of MLLs and elicit student voice. MLLs in particular benefit from active learning and productive language use, and educators can further support MLLs by reviewing instructional materials to ensure that a) there are abundant opportunities for students to engage in structured talk with peers and that b) MLLs have the chance to work with the target language in an interpretative capacity before being asked to use the language themselves in an expressive mode of communication.<sup>5</sup>

Within the present framework, **academic discourse** is defined as a sustained spoken interaction between two or more students in which knowledge is shared using the conventions of particular genres and disciplines. Although this definition focuses on oral language, the terms *academic discourse*—and *academic language* more broadly—merit scrutiny. The language practices promoted in pursuit of academic language often correspond to those exhibited by monolingual, upper middle class, White language users in non-rural communities. Judgements about which language users are intelligent, who is competent, and who sounds professional often reflect dominant language ideologies. These ideologies often reinforce hierarchies among language users—hierarchies that shape our understanding of what makes language *academic*. Given these biases and power dynamics, educators have a responsibility to validate students’ home language practices and interrogate the ideologies and systems that underpin social norms around academic language.

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<sup>5</sup> Students often develop language proficiency with a given skill in interpretative modes (listening, reading, viewing) before they develop proficiency in expressive modes of communication (speaking, writing, representing). Students will likely be able to interpret a particular word, sentence, or discourse feature before they can use that same language in their own writing or speaking. Through deliberate sequencing (i.e., by emphasizing interpretative language modes first within a unit or lesson sequence), educators can support students’ language development.

## Formative Assessment

*Teachers routinely use qualitative and quantitative assessment data (including student-self assessments) to analyze their teaching and student learning in order to provide timely feedback to students and make necessary adjustments (e.g., adding or removing scaffolding and/or assistive technologies, identifying need to provide intensive instruction, etc.) that improve student outcomes.*

### Indicators

- Students produce a range of work samples designed to demonstrate discipline-specific understandings and related language development.
- Students interpret regular content-driven language feedback<sup>6</sup> in diverse environments and mediums.
- Students set goals for their grade-level content and language learning and track their progress with collaborative adult support.
- Students collaborate in flexible data-informed groups and give respectful and constructive peer feedback using language that is modeled and scaffolded.
- Students self-select learning strategies that capitalize on their strengths.

Through this HQIP, educators offer formative language feedback as part of their core content instruction and adjust their teaching based on assessment data and cycles of inquiry related to local MTSS practices. Although curriculum-based assessments are already built into high-quality curricular materials, it may be necessary for educators to amplify existing assessments for further disciplinary language development. Formative assessment practices must—above all else—allow educators to collect content-driven language samples. Without authentic language samples, it will prove difficult for educators to give students the language-focused feedback needed to achieve their language growth goals. The Council of Chief State School Officers (2021) has offered the following definition of formative assessment.

*Formative assessment is a planned, ongoing process used by all students and teachers during learning and teaching to elicit and use evidence of student learning to improve student understanding of intended disciplinary learning outcomes and support students to become self-directed learners.*

*Effective use of the formative assessment process requires students and teachers to integrate and embed the following practices in a collaborative and respectful classroom environment:*

- *Clarifying learning goals and success criteria within a broader progression of learning;*
- *Eliciting and analyzing evidence of student thinking;*
- *Engaging in self-assessment and peer feedback;*
- *Providing actionable feedback; and*
- *Using evidence and feedback to move learning forward by adjusting learning strategies, goals, or next instructional steps.*

<sup>6</sup> To support MLLs in making content-driven language growth, educators must provide ample formative language feedback to students between the administration of interim and summative English language proficiency assessments. Although frequency may vary based on context, effective feedback is timely and actionable. Educators should prioritize these two quality considerations (timeliness and specificity) over sheer quantity.

As this definition suggests, MLLs should participate in goal-setting and have opportunities to self-assess and provide feedback to peers using established performance criteria—all as part of core grade-level formative assessment processes. These activities promote metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness and ultimately, greater student autonomy. For information about how to leverage the 2020 Edition of the WIDA ELD Standards Framework to offer formative language feedback, please see the section on Alignment to the WIDA ELD Standards.

### Putting this into Practice

#### Educators:

- Pick a HQIP in line with your professional development goals, and consider the MLL-focused indicators for that practice. What structures or instructional supports might empower students to enact the habits of learning in the indicators?
- Reflect on daily instruction with the HQIPs. If co-teaching or adopting a new curriculum, debrief specific lessons with other implementing teachers. Given the HQIPs, how might you amplify the materials or your delivery if you were to re-teach?

#### Administrators:

- Conduct a needs assessment with staff based on current practices with MLLs, and offer targeted professional learning about one or more of the HQIPs. What evidence will you collect to determine whether professional learning was successful?
- Engage in classroom walkthroughs with the [MLL Classroom Snapshot Tool](#). Start small (e.g., with one HQIP or set of MLL-focused indicators as a look-for), and visit both general education and ESOL/BDL classrooms. Do educators know your look-for in advance?

### Engaging in Comprehensive Scaffolding Practices

Although not named explicitly within the HQIPs, scaffolding undergirds the effective implementation of all five practices. A hallmark of equitable MLL instruction is integrated language and content, and designing instruction that systematically integrates learning goals for language and content, both within and across units of study, is itself a scaffold. When it comes to student-centered engagement and academic discourse, scaffolds serve as a vehicle through which MLLs—and all students—can engage in collaborative inquiry. Furthermore, within formative assessment processes, educators must a) provide meaningful scaffolds so learners are able to self-assess and give peers feedback aligned to performance criteria and b) scaffold formative feedback to the learner, leveraging varied mediums of communication, environments, and modalities to ensure that feedback is comprehensible and students have actionable supports to change course.

#### What is scaffolding?

Instructional scaffolds are **temporary supports designed to bridge the gap between what students can do independently and what students can do with an assist**. Effective scaffolding nurtures student autonomy by facilitating productive struggle (high challenge with high support), which allows learners to hone their skills. As with other student populations, scaffolding for MLLs facilitates access to grade-level materials. It is not the same as differentiating for individual students nor does it involve modifying grade-level content, though educators can certainly differentiate scaffolds to better meet the needs of students at different ELP levels.

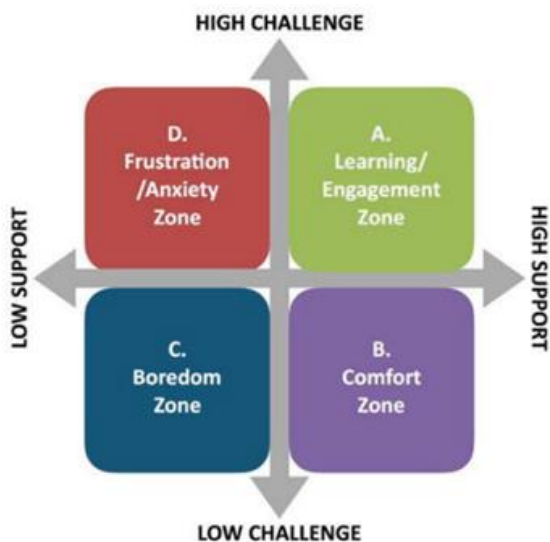


Image Source: WIDA Focus Bulletin on Scaffolding Learning for Multilingual Students in Math

The temporary nature of scaffolding is key to its long-term success. Educators can optimize student growth with scaffolds that continually stretch their learners’ zones of proximal development. As students progress, so too should their supports. Educators should therefore regularly revisit the scaffolds they provide using student data. By adjusting scaffolds and adding or removing supports, educators can help students develop the competencies they need to independently navigate rigorous tasks later. The need for scaffolding does not wane as students’ proficiency increases; on the contrary, educators should strive to scaffold up for students already meeting grade-level expectations.

Instructional scaffolds contain two different dimensions: 1) the structures that shape instruction, which educators plan ahead of time at a macro level, and 2) the interactive processes that the structure fosters, which come into play on a more micro level.

The former are embedded into the learning itself, whereas the latter are improvised supports, given just-in-time. All scaffolds exist along this structural-process continuum.

- **Process scaffolds** promote student autonomy by responding to what students need in the moment. Educators provide learners with supports that are improvised and “just right”—anticipated perhaps, but administered based on real-time observation.
- **Structural scaffolds** promote student autonomy by bringing consistency and a sense of order and academic safety to instructional activities. These scaffolds are familiar and pre-meditated—a product of coherent planning.



Depending on the context, some supports can function as either structural or process scaffolds. For example, educators can routinely promote academic discourse with a set of pre-taught sentence frames, which could serve as a structural scaffold and a springboard for students to generate new but similar language for particular language functions; however, educators can also provide students with task-dependent sentence frames as a process scaffold, based on demonstrated student need during instruction.

Regardless of the type, scaffolding with MLLs should facilitate both grade-level content learning and language development. Language is, in and of itself, a scaffold for meaningfully accessing content—for MLLs and for all students, so scaffolds that expand language access are especially high-leverage. For example, instructional plans that systematically integrate content and language (i.e., those with integrated learning goals) constitute a structural scaffold. The tables below contain additional examples of scaffolds that educators can use in the four major content areas, but please note: this table contains scaffolds on the *process* end of the structural-process scaffold continuum.

Sensory Supports	Graphic Supports	Interactive Supports
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Real-life objects (realia)</li> <li>• Manipulatives</li> <li>• Pictures &amp; photographs</li> <li>• Illustrations, diagrams &amp; drawings</li> <li>• Magazines &amp; newspapers</li> <li>• Physical activities</li> <li>• Videos &amp; Films</li> <li>• Broadcasts</li> <li>• Models &amp; figures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Charts</li> <li>• Graphic organizers</li> <li>• Tables</li> <li>• Graphs</li> <li>• Timelines</li> <li>• Number lines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In pairs or partners</li> <li>• In triads or small groups</li> <li>• In a whole group</li> <li>• Using cooperative group structures</li> <li>• With the Internet (Web sites) or software programs</li> <li>• In the native language (L1)</li> <li>• With mentors</li> </ul>

**Image Source:** 2007 Edition of WIDA English Language Proficiency Standards and Resource Guide

### Why scaffold?

Scaffolding empowers all learners to develop autonomy. In building construction, a scaffold is a **temporary** platform that supports workers in making repairs and participating in structural assembly. In education, scaffolds serve a similar purpose: they are a bridge rather than a permanent structure. Scaffolds give learners the boost they need to reach their full potential. MLLs in particular benefit because this practice stands to both expand their access to core grade-level content and disciplinary language development.

### *The case for maximizing instructional time.*

One compelling reason to scaffold is that educators can better prioritize grade-level learning goals through scaffolding. Structural and process scaffolds can make expectations for tasks more accessible, allowing students to focus their cognitive resources on rigorous language and content. A high-leverage structural scaffold would be to use familiar activity structures. Common activity structures include turn-and-talks, fish bowls, four corners, talking lines, and round-robins. Name recognition of these activities can reduce the cognitive load on MLLs—and all learners—by eliminating the need to process a new set of instructions for every new task, which in turn frees up learners' attention and cognitive resources for new content or language. If a novel procedure is created for each task, students must invest time and energy in understanding the new rules for engagement. With a familiar set of expectations, teachers can streamline student engagement with academic content and language practices, maximizing instructional time.

### *The case for promoting safe learning environments.*

Another reason to scaffold is that familiar structures and reliable supports create a safe learning environment for students, encouraging learners to take academic risks. The sense of academic safety that students experience can be enhanced if scaffolds are implemented system-wide, whether it be at the classroom level, school level, or among grade-level and content teams. For instance, if students are taught a particular strategy for writing a short, constructed response in one class, they

would likely benefit from consistency (e.g., familiar acronyms) across classes and grade levels. The same is true of strategies that are explicitly taught for attacking word problems (e.g., the Three Reads Protocol) or forming a counterclaims and voicing dissenting views in class discussions (e.g., protocols for respectfully disagreeing).

### Putting this into Practice

#### Educators:

- Take stock of your scaffolding practices. What macro and micro scaffolds do you routinely incorporate into your instruction?
  - **Macro scaffolding practice.** Are language and content goals integrated at the unit level? Are familiar activity structures being leveraged?
  - **Micro scaffolding practice.** What interactive supports are embedded in the adopted curricula? Where do you need to amplify supports?
- Determine the effectiveness of scaffolds. When reflecting on scaffolds for particular students, reach out to colleagues who teach those students in different settings.

#### Administrators:

- If working with a new curricula, debrief major units of study with implementing teachers. Use the [MLL Non-Negotiables Review Tools](#) to evaluate and reflect on the responsiveness of the curricula to the cultural and linguistic needs of MLLs.
- Identify opportunities to create system-wide scaffolds across grades and/or content areas. Are there shared expectations for collaborative learning (e.g., Turn and Talks, sentence frames for accountable talk, roles and responsibilities in group work) across classes?

## Making Academic Discourse a Centerpiece of Instruction

Although academic discourse is represented within the HQIPs, RIDE has elaborated on this practice below due to its importance in facilitating content-driven language development and college and career readiness. As with scaffolding, effective implementation of this practice hinges on the skillful use of other instructional practices. Academic discourse is one type of student-centered engagement. Educators must not only scaffold engagement opportunities for students, but also align their planning for academic discourse to content learning goals, offering formative language feedback to students based on their contributions to discussions. In this way, academic discourse connects to other components of high-quality instruction for MLLs. It also supports standards-aligned instruction, particularly implementation of Rhode Island's Speaking and Listening Standards for Literacy in the Content Areas for Grades 6-12.

### What is academic discourse?

Academic discourse is a **sustained spoken interaction between two or more students in which knowledge is shared using the conventions of particular genres and disciplines.** These interactions are student-driven and characterized by open-ended, standards-aligned inquiries in which students orally connect, extend ideas, and ground their thinking in evidence drawn from complex texts, content knowledge, and lived experience.

In these exchanges, students navigate and negotiate meaning using specific genre and disciplinary practices for explanation, clarification, information-sharing, argumentation, and storytelling. Students

engage with peers in extended reciprocal talk about rigorous academic content, co-constructing knowledge and new understanding in alignment with core learning goals. Students take initiative, with guidance and scaffolded support from the teacher and/or peers, building autonomy and using language appropriate to the discipline—all the while engaging in critical thinking and dialogue.

To fully understand the term *academic discourse* as used in this framework, it is helpful to know about discourse in general and linguistic registers.

- **Discourse:** Broadly speaking, *discourse* is language in any modality (e.g., spoken, written, visual) that conveys meaning. Traffic signs and emojis qualify as discourse, as do essays and PowerPoint presentations. This broad definition of discourse, however, encompasses far more than *discourse* as used in the present framework. In the *High-Quality Instructional Framework for MLLs to Thrive*, RIDE uses *discourse* more narrowly to attend to units of language that exist on a level beyond, or more macro than, the sentence. WIDA uses *discourse* in a similar way, breaking its proficiency level descriptors down by language features at the word-, sentence-, and discourse-levels.
- **Register:** The term *register* refers to predictable variations in language use based on context. There are formal, informal, and academic registers—each of which come with distinct expectations. In U.S. classrooms, for example, educators often promote academic talk rather than colloquial speech among students. Prominent features of academic registers include embedded clauses, passive voice, and nominalization. These language features are common in academic contexts and shape our understanding about what makes discourse *academic*. Registers are different from dialects, in that dialects refer to variations in language use characteristic of specific speech communities.

Although RIDE readily promotes student use of academic registers, it is important that educators and administrators maintain an asset-oriented approach in facilitating academic discourse, particularly when working with students from minoritized groups. Educational agencies have a responsibility to honor and sustain the linguistic traditions of their students. Thus, classroom-based academic discourse, when done well, will reflect the discourse practices of local communities—capturing the rich ways our families actually use language, rather than making prescriptive judgements about how students and their families ought to talk. In other words, the school culture around academic discourse should invite students to blend discursive traditions so that classroom discourse bears traits of speech from local students and families, while exhibiting common features of academic language, such as content-based vocabulary and discipline-specific practices or conventions (e.g., attribution and elaboration).

This understanding of academic discourse is in line with the descriptive view of language presented in the WIDA ELD Standards Framework, as well as discourse-level dimensions of WIDA's proficiency level descriptors. Like WIDA, our approach in Rhode Island rejects prescriptive views of language teaching and learning; however, unlike WIDA, our academic discourse focus for the purposes of this framework is on extended oral language use—specifically *oral* language use by *students* that takes on an academic *register*.

### Why academic discourse?

Given the emphasis on rigor and evidence-based argumentation in Rhode Island's state standards, students from all language backgrounds stand to benefit from academic discourse. All students are, after all, academic language learners. With that said, academic discourse is particularly important for MLLs because having authentic opportunities to use discipline-specific language in spoken interaction facilitates learners' overall language development.



***The case for oracy.***

Not all modes of disciplinary academic language are alike. Of the different domains, oral language does not see the same explicit coverage in K-12 classrooms as literacy. What's more, teachers often dominate classroom talk, with students in resource-rich classrooms often enjoying more opportunities to speak than peers in underserved communities do. Such disparities represent an equity issue for MLLs—one that is especially pressing for language educators, given the role that speaking and listening play in mediating the development of reading and writing. Research on oracy (learning to talk and *through* talk) in the United Kingdom has linked quality classroom talk to academic achievement. The type of talk most associated with positive impacts on academic achievement is exploratory in nature, meaning students contribute to discussions by substantively acknowledging or building on prior comments and disagreeing with constructive criticism or in search of common ground, rather than adding in a superficial, cumulative fashion or assuming a disputational tone. Through quality academic discourse, students can cultivate the speaking and listening skills needed to thrive in disciplinary literacy environments.

***The case for all students.***

Every learner—regardless of language background—deserves opportunities to engage in academic discourse. Even native English speakers have difficulty acquiring academic registers without meaningful exposure and practice, and Rhode Island's state standards call for increasingly complex texts and tasks, along with argumentation across the disciplines—all of which place new linguistic demands on students, irrespective of MLL status. To demonstrate grade-level proficiency in ELA, mathematics, and science, students must learn the discursive conventions of each discipline. These heightened academic demands are paralleled by real-world demands in the workplace. Employers consistently rate oral interpersonal communication as among the most highly sought after on job market surveys, with students' interviewing and networking skills impacting their postsecondary success in college and careers. Educators must thus promote disciplinary language to support students in not only meeting grade-level expectations but also demonstrating college and career readiness.

**Putting this into Practice****Educators:**

- Review an upcoming unit, and reflect on opportunities for academic discourse. What scaffolds might support students in stretching their oral language use? Are MLLs able to prepare and participate equitably in discussions?
- Consider existing activity structures and formative assessment practices for academic discourse in your classroom. How can you enhance familiarity with these activity structures? Do students receive feedback on their oral language use?

**Administrators:**

- Conduct classroom walkthroughs with the [Academic Discourse Tool](#). How would you rate the quality of academic discourse at your school site(s)? Are these trends similar across general education and ESOL/BDL classrooms?
- Establish schoolwide expectations for academic discourse. Do educators across content areas have common terms and protocols for discussion-based activities? Are there shared structures for accountable talk?

## Promoting Disciplinary Literacy in Every Content Area – coming soon!

MLLs—and all learners—need access to explicit, systematic reading and writing instruction in every class to develop college and career readiness. RIDE will soon release guidance that connects evidence-based instructional practices for promoting disciplinary literacy with MLLs to statewide initiatives, such as the Right to Read Act, and state-adopted Reading and Writing Standards for Literacy in the Content Areas in Grades 6-12.

## Providing Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education

All MLLs deserve opportunities to develop their academic and linguistic skills in environments that respect and sustain their cultures. Our schools are points of juncture where students, educators and communities can partner to enhance meaningful and relevant education for MLLs.

**“Culture hides much more than it reveals, and strangely enough what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants. Years of study have convinced me that the real job is not to understand foreign culture but to understand our own.”**

— Edward T. Hall

### What is Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education?

Awareness of one’s own worldview is not universal. It is profoundly influenced by life experiences and mediated by a variety of factors, including race, ethnicity, gender, and social class. As educators, we stand to benefit from building sociocultural consciousness. Without sociocultural consciousness, we may rely solely on personal experiences to make sense of students’ lives—a subconscious habit that can result in misinterpretations of students’ experiences and lead to miscommunication (Villegas and Lucas, 2012). Therefore, it is important for educators to develop self-awareness and the sociocultural skills needed to recognize and honor the home cultures of their students while teaching the nuances of school culture (Calderón et al., 2011; Delpit, 1995; Saifer et al., 2011).

For the purposes of this framework, RIDE will focus on research-based Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education (CRSE) practices for teachers and administrators and their implications for instruction. Ultimately, the intent is to provide context to support educators in the classroom to be responsive to students’ linguistic and sociocultural diversity.

**“We must keep in mind that education, at its best, hones and develops the knowledge and skills each student already possesses, while at the same time adding new knowledge and skills to that base.”**

— Lisa Delpit

To better understand culturally relevant teaching, culturally responsive pedagogy, and culturally sustaining pedagogy, Snyder and Staehr Fenner (2021) created the following table synthesizing perspectives from key researchers in the area of culturally responsive education:

Scholar	Culturally Responsive Teaching	Teacher’s Actions
Gloria Ladson-Billings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically.</li> <li>Develop sociocultural consciousness and caring for students.</li> <li>Foster students’ sense of cultural competence and the relationship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage academic success and cultural competence.</li> <li>Help students to recognize, understand, and critique current social inequities.</li> </ul>

	between home/community and school culture.	
<b>Geneva Gay</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective.</li> <li>• Look closely at what all students bring to their learning.</li> <li>• View culture as an asset, which can be used effectively to enhance academic and social achievement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restructure attitudes and beliefs.</li> <li>• Understand resistance to Culturally Responsive Teaching.</li> <li>• Center culture and difference.</li> <li>• Establish pedagogical connections.</li> </ul>
<b>Zaretta Hammond</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on the impact of Culturally Responsive Teaching on the brain and learning; the brain seeks to minimize social threats and maximize opportunities to connect.</li> <li>• Couple all new information with existing funds of knowledge to be learned.</li> <li>• Ensure that cultural knowledge serves as a scaffold to connect what the student knows to new concepts and content in order to promote effective information processing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use stories, music, and repetition to connect to students and build intellectual capacity.</li> <li>• Consciously work to make sure that all students feel included and valued through both classroom and school culture and curriculum.</li> <li>• Develop a sociopolitical consciousness.</li> <li>• Create student-teacher relationships and socio-emotional connections to students.</li> </ul>

“Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly.”

— Geneva Gay

### Why Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education?

Rhode Island’s [Blueprint for Multilingual Learners Success](#) calls for asset-based systems that value, respect and sustain MLLs’ linguistic and cultural diversity. Given the role that language hierarchies play in positioning certain language practices above others, the urgency for culturally sustaining pedagogies is particularly high for MLLs whose multilingualism is often not celebrated as part of the dominant culture (Paris & Alim, 2017). Rhode Island’s *Blueprint for MLL Success* also calls for family- and community-centered systems. This principle supports CRSE practices and is in line the following finding from the Institute for Educational Leadership (2005): *Much of what culturally competent leaders must know and be able to do is learned in relationships with families and communities.* Beyond the *Blueprint for MLL Success*, the [TESOL K-12 Standards](#) for educator preparation highlight the importance of CRSE. Standard 2 in particular covers the sociocultural context that educators need to attend to support the success of MLLs.

How is CRSE connected to instruction and education equity more broadly? The call for CRSE is built into many existing initiatives and standards, and it is important to recognize these connections so as to establish coherence across bodies of work and develop shared expectations for the education of MLLs. One of the five priority areas in the [RIDE Strategic Plan 2021-2025](#) is equity, and in Rhode Island, legislation was passed requiring the adoption of high-quality standards-aligned curricula. CRSE is integral to these efforts. Rhode Island has partnered with EdReports, a nationally

recognized, independent non-profit organization that provides expert reviews of K-12 instructional materials in ELA, Mathematics, and Science based on alignment to standards and usability. Within EdReport’s published reviews, Gateway 3 is particularly relevant, as culture and language guide the evaluation of curricula in that gateway, among other criteria. Given the importance of CRSE, RIDE also has developed guidance and [CRSE review tools](#) in ELA and Math for local teams to use as part of the curriculum selection process. These review tools are designed to support LEA teams in becoming critical consumers of curriculum materials.

**“We must teach the way students learn, rather than expecting them to learn the way we teach.”**

— Pedro Noguera

### Putting this into Practice

**Educators:** In *Teaching for Equity: The CLEAR Paradigm*, Nguyen and Commins (2020) introduce the following mindsets and practices needed to implement asset-oriented education.

#### Pedagogical Dispositions and Critical Stance

1. *Develop and exhibit positive orientation toward multilingualism, multiculturalism, and social justice.*
2. *Maintain a critical, asset-based pedagogical stance that approaches teaching and learning from multiple perspectives.*
3. *Critically examine your assumptions about power, privilege, and difference and how these influence your disposition and decisions as an educator.*
4. *Exhibit dispositions, skills, and practice that exemplify professional preparedness to teach in culturally and linguistically diverse settings.*
5. *Continually develop your own intercultural competence and advocacy skills.*

#### Pedagogical Practices

6. *Develop and demonstrate an integrated repertoire of pedagogical, linguistic, and cross-cultural skills needed to help youth learn and develop.*
7. *Investigate and leverage funds of knowledge that students bring from their respective families and communities in your instruction, in order to affirm and cultivate a strong sense of identity for your students as learners.*
8. *Create and maintain an engaging and inclusive learning environment that acknowledges and utilizes students’ socioemotional, linguistic, and cultural repertoires.*
9. *Intentionally teach about and address issues of diversity, difference, and equity.*
10. *Collaborate with students, colleagues, families, and communities to find resources and implement instruction that is optimal for student learning.*

**Administrators:** Administrators have a crucial role in promoting CRSE in their school. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2020) has issued the following recommendations:

- *Provide opportunities for faculty and staff to engage in professional conversations in developing skills related to understanding own biases and how to enrich students’ learning through culturally responsive practices supporting individual students and developing flexibly in adapting their content, curriculum, and teaching strategies.*

- Equip educators with the skills to increase their instructional differentiation repertoire to meet the educational needs of students. Principals should consider specialized training in the following areas: Multilingual learners; exceptional children services; and students who have experienced social hostility such as racism, sexism, trauma, and other negative encounters.
- Develop student interest surveys and lead teachers to learn about their students' interests. Incorporate staff meeting time for teachers to report on what motivates students to learn; how a relationship has been built with each student; and what they learned about students' interests. Ensure that teachers identify and have a specialized focus on students who are marginalized.
- Create a library (physical or virtual) with research and resources for staff and teachers. Use the material to provide research reviews or book studies to help build foundational knowledge and skills for ensuring culturally responsive teaching and learning.

### Alignment to the WIDA ELD Standards

For educators with one or more active MLLs on their roster, enacting standards-aligned instruction means working with both state-adopted content standards and state-adopted ELD standards. Under ESSA, all educators are required to reflect on the language demands of their grade-level content and move MLLs toward both English language proficiency and academic content proficiency. In other words, every Rhode Island educator shares responsibility for promoting disciplinary language development through content instruction.

Fortunately, the WIDA ELD Standards Framework lends itself to integration in the core content areas. The 2020 Edition offers a wealth of resources to support educators in 1) planning content-driven language instruction based on the language functions prominent in each content area and 2) using the proficiency level descriptors to give students formative language feedback, but first, it may be helpful for educators to familiarize themselves with the organizational structure of the WIDA ELD Standards Framework, as Rhode Island's ELD standards bear considerable differences from Rhode Island's state standards in ELA, mathematics, and science.

### Key Terms from the 2020 Edition

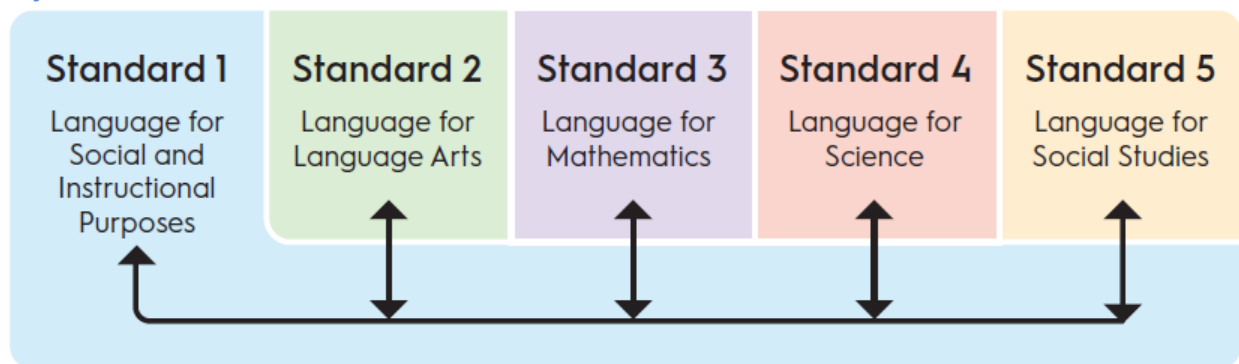


Image Source: 2020 Edition of WIDA ELD Standards Framework

Although the 2020 Edition of the WIDA ELD Standards Framework differs from the 2012 Amplification (the prior edition), the five ELD Standard statements remain the same. Standard 1 is cross-cutting and applicable in every school context, whereas Standards 2–5 focus on language use in each of the content areas. General educators are expected to support both Standard 1 and the

corresponding ELD standard(s) for their content area(s) **within** and **as part of** their core classroom instruction.

In the 2020 Edition, each WIDA ELD Standard is broken into four genre<sup>7</sup> families: Narrate, Inform, Explain, and Argue. WIDA refers to these genre families as Key Language Uses (KLUs) and generated them based on analyses of the language demands in state academic content standards. The KLUs are important because they drive explicit language instruction in each of the content areas. For Standards 2–5, the distribution of KLUs is similar across grades 4–12, but variation exists in the early grades, with grades K–3 placing more emphasis on Inform than Explain or Argue. Of the four content areas, only Standard 2 features Narrate as very prominent.

Each KLU is further broken down by **language function** and feature. Language functions reflect the dominant practices for engaging in genre-specific tasks (e.g., in narratives, students often orient their audiences by describing the setting or characters). By contrast, **language features** represent linguistic and non-linguistic resources (e.g., connected clauses, noun phrases, tables, graphs) that students might use when performing a particular language function. Together, the KLUs, language functions, and language features capture what it would look and sound like for students to use language deftly in each content area. Please see below for an example of how these three elements appear in the WIDA ELD Standards.

**GRADES 6-8 WIDA ELD STANDARD 2**  
Language for Language Arts **Inform**

**Language Expectations:** Multilingual learners will...

<p><b>ELD-LA.6-8.Inform.Interpretive</b> Interpret informational texts in language arts by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying and/or summarizing main ideas and their relationship to supporting ideas</li> <li>Analyzing observations and descriptions in textual evidence for key attributes, qualities, characteristics, activities, and behaviors</li> <li>Evaluating the impact of author's key word choices over the course of a text</li> </ul>	<p><b>ELD-LA.6-8.Inform.Expressive</b> Construct informational texts in language arts that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce and define topic and/or entity for audience</li> <li>Establish objective or neutral stance</li> <li>Add precision, details, and clarity about relevant attributes, qualities, characteristics, activities, and behaviors</li> <li>Develop coherence and cohesion throughout text</li> </ul>
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**Language Functions and Sample Language Features**  
Introduce and define topic and/or entity for audience through...

- Generalized nouns and descriptive titles to introduce topic (*Revolutions, Environmental Disasters, Mining the Earth*)
- Opening statements to identify type of information (*describing, comparing/contrasting, classifying*)
- Relating verbs (*have, be, belong to*) to link an entity with its attributes; define, describe and classify (*It was a cultural and intellectual movement*)
- Timeless present verbs (*rises, shapes, determines*) to indicate generalizable nature of information
- Expanded noun groups to define key concepts (*a period in European history that took place*)

**Language Functions (common patterns of language use) appear here and again below**

**Language Features (examples of language resources) appear here**

Image Source: 2020 Edition of WIDA ELD Standards Framework

The 2020 Edition of the WIDA ELD Standards Framework is different from previous iterations in that it contains PLDs by grade level cluster to support developmentally appropriate, content-driven

<sup>7</sup> The term *genre* in the WIDA ELD Standards Framework goes beyond genres as often understood in literary contexts. Common genres in literature and film include fantasy, science fiction, horror, and dramas. However, genres also exist within the fields of science, math, and social studies. In the WIDA ELD Standards, *genres* are recurring types of multimodal communication that have unique discourse and language features (e.g., lab reports, mathematical proofs, or abstracts for peer-reviewed journal articles). These features are shaped by the intended audience and purpose.

language learning. Educators should draw on these PLDs to amplify their formative assessment practices, monitor MLLs’ language growth and provide language-focused feedback in the content areas.

### Embedding Content-Driven Language Functions into Core Content Teaching

To facilitate language access, educators should establish language goals at both the unit- and lesson-level that align to and propel grade-level learning across content areas. Coherent instructional planning for such content-driven language development (i.e., well-sequenced plans that integrate language and content instruction) is itself an instructional scaffold, and in fact, it is through such intentionally sequenced skill-building that educators can promote educational equity for MLLs. Below is a sample language goal for a grades 2-3 Language Arts unit.

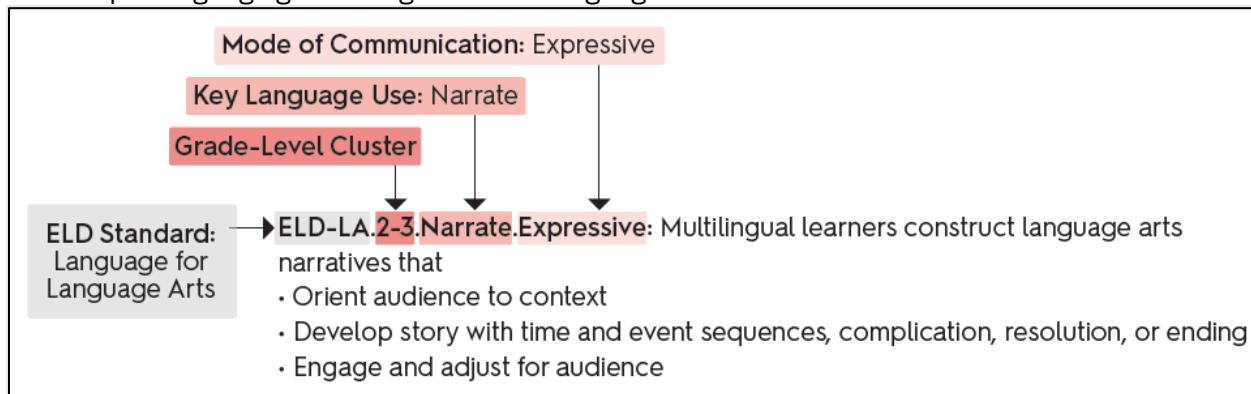


Image Source: 2020 Edition of WIDA ELD Standards Framework

As this example demonstrates, effective language goals contain several key elements, including but not limited to: 1) a focus ELD standard (in this case, Standard 2: the Language for Language Arts), 2) a grade level cluster, 3) a KLU, 4) a primary mode of communication (either interpretative or expressive), and 5) at least one language function (common patterns of language use). Although not labeled, the three bullets above represent language functions.

Intentional sequencing of language goals is key. For example, it is more difficult to Argue than to Inform, and more demanding linguistically to use expressive language than engage in interpretative language.

**Expressive language** refers to speaking, writing, and representing, whereas **interpretative language** includes listening, reading, and viewing. Well-sequenced language goals should reflect this progression.

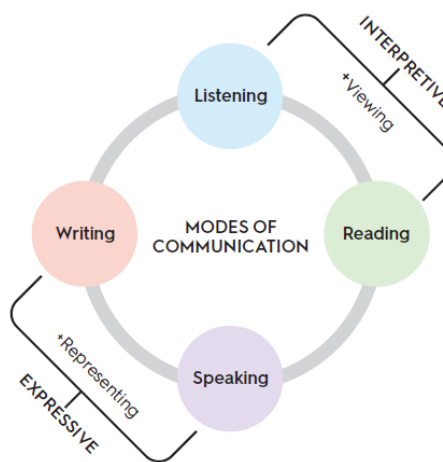


Image Source: 2020 Edition of WIDA ELD Standards Framework

Language goals at the unit- and lesson-level will differ in their level of granularity. A language goal for an individual lesson will likely target specific sets of language features, whereas goal statements for an entire unit may not call out specific language features. With that said, high-quality unit plans will delve into the types of language features necessary to engage in disciplinary practices. Without such forethought, it would be difficult to intentionally sequence the linguistic subskills associated with each language function. For example, students will likely need descriptive language, such as

adjectives and complex noun phrases, to orient audiences to context, but students would likely benefit from covering adjectives and complex noun phrases in separate lessons. Thus, unit plans should account for these language features and anticipate the progression of learning so students have well-structured opportunities to stretch their language use.

For a full list of language functions for each standard and KLU, please see the 2020 Edition of the WIDA ELD Standards Framework. The language features provided in the 2020 Edition represent just a sampling, and the limited nature of this sampling reflects the infinite possibilities that exist for combining language features to execute any particular language function. Still, educators can use the sampling to identify additional language features that are worth explicitly teaching.

Another set of resources for identifying target language features are the PLDs and annotated language samples. Unlike previous iterations, the 2020 Edition has PLDs for each grade level cluster, and these descriptors offer insights into the different types of language features, such as *simple sentences* or *adverbials of time, manner and place*, that may support students in carrying out core language functions at their grade level and content area. Likewise, the annotated language samples in the 2020 Edition can support educators in promoting integrated content-driven language development. The annotated language samples show the language functions and features in action, as demonstrated below in the grades 9–12 example for the KLU Argue in English language arts. They can serve as a resource to educators in backwards-planning and unpacking the language of their discipline.

Functions & Features	"Everyday Use"	Functions & Features
<p><b>Introduce and develop precise claims through...</b></p> <p>Declarative statements to frame topic, provide background information, state claim</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In "Everyday Use" ... invisible conflict.</li> </ul> <p>Noun groups to provide details</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>unique organization</u></li> <li><u>an almost invisible conflict</u></li> <li><u>the opposing views in content of adjacent paragraphs</u></li> <li><u>the continuing subject of division</u></li> </ul>	<p>In "Everyday Use" Alice Walker intertwines context, <u>unique organization</u> and juxtaposition to subtly shine a light on <u>an almost invisible conflict</u>.</p> <p>Juxtaposition is <u>the opposing views in content of adjacent paragraphs</u> is used to show <u>the continuing subject of division</u>.</p> <p>The introduction of Dee is begun with <u>what Mama wanted with a T.V. show providing the dream setting and what Dee actually is in real life</u>.</p>	<p><b>Support claims and refute counterclaims with valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence through...</b></p> <p>A variety of clauses to support claim</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>what Mama wanted with a T.V. show providing the dream setting</u></li> <li><u>what Dee actually is in real life</u></li> </ul>

Image Source: 2020 Edition of WIDA ELD Standards Framework

### Using the Proficiency Level Descriptors for Formative Language Feedback

As is true of formative assessments for academic content, establishing clear learning goals is an important initial step in progress monitoring and determining whether students have mastered the target content-driven language. A key next step would be to determine what language samples students already are producing through embedded curriculum assessments.

Rather than creating separate assessments to monitor progress with disciplinary language, educators should aim to augment assessments already part of their local core curricula. For



example, multiple modalities could be incorporated into existing content assessments, allowing students to orally explain how they arrived at a particular solution or claim. This practice of amplifying existing materials with additional modalities aligns with Universal Design for Learning Guidelines by providing multiple means of representation (perception, language, and symbols) and multiple means for students to demonstrate their understanding (physical action, expression, and communication) – a critical design element for MLLs who need daily explicit speaking, listening, reading, and writing instruction.

The proficiency level descriptors (PLDs) in the 2020 Edition should serve as a resource to educators not only when refining language goals but also when amplifying existing formative assessments, assessing students’ content-driven language proficiency, and providing formative language feedback, as the PLDs highlight what language proficiency looks and sounds like at each level. These descriptors are organized according to their discourse, sentence, and word dimensions. At the discourse level, as shown in the following table, the 2020 Edition distinguishes between language features that contribute to organization, cohesion, or density.

**Grades 4-5 WIDA Proficiency Level Descriptors for the Interpretive Communication Mode (Listening, Reading, and Viewing)**  
*Toward the end of each proficiency level, when scaffolded appropriately, multilingual learners will...*

Criteria	End of Level 1	End of Level 2	End of Level 3	End of Level 4	End of Level 5	Level 6
DISCOURSE Organization of language	Understand how coherent texts (spoken, written, multimodal) are created...					
	around specific topics ( <i>clean water</i> ) with multiple related simple sentences	to meet a purpose (to inform, argue, explain or narrate) in a series of topic-related extended sentences	to meet a purpose in a short, connected text	to meet a purpose through generic (not genre-specific) organizational patterns in a text (introduction, body, conclusion)	to meet a purpose through genre-specific organizational patterns (paragraph openers and topic sentences signaling relationships between paragraphs)	to meet a purpose through genre-specific organizational patterns (claim, evidence, reasoning) linking ideas, events, and reasons across a text
DISCOURSE Cohesion of language	Understand how ideas are connected across a whole text through...					
	frequently used cohesive devices (repetition, demonstratives)	a few different types of cohesive devices (pronoun referencing, etc.)	multiple cohesive devices (synonyms, antonyms)	a variety of cohesive devices that connect larger meaningful chunks of text (including class/subclass, whole/part)	a wide variety of cohesive devices that connect ideas throughout text including substitution and ellipsis	cohesive devices and common strategies that connect ideas throughout text (given/new)
DISCOURSE Density of language	Understand how ideas are elaborated or condensed through...					
	multi-word noun groups with connectors ( <i>mean and nasty bullies</i> )	expanded noun groups with classifiers ( <i>mean and nasty fourth grade bullies</i> )	expanded noun groups with prepositional phrases ( <i>my favorite character in this book</i> )	expanded noun groups with embedded clauses ( <i>my favorite character who stood up to the bullies</i> )	expanded noun groups with a variety of embedded clauses ( <i>my favorite character who stood up to the bullies and hardship</i> )	expanded noun groups with a wide variety embedded clauses and compacted noun groups (nominalization: <i>she stood up to bullies = her courage</i> )
SENTENCE Grammatical complexity	Understand how meanings are extended or enhanced through...					
	simple sentences ( <i>Strong winds blow through the forest.</i> )	related simple sentences ( <i>Winds blow through the forest. The trees sway and shake.</i> )	multiple related simple sentences ( <i>Winds blow through the forest. The trees sway and shake. Dead branches fall off to the ground.</i> )	simple or compound sentences with familiar ways of combining clauses (using coordinating conjunction: <i>The trees sway and shake, and dead branches fall off to the ground.</i> )	compound sentences with frequently used ways of combining clauses ( <i>Strong winds blow through the forests, but the mighty oaks stand tall and proud.</i> )	compound and complex sentences with a variety of ways of combining clauses addressing genre, audience, and content area ( <i>When strong winds blow through the forests, the trees sway and shake.</i> )
WORD, PHRASE Precision of language	Understand how precise meanings are created through everyday, cross-disciplinary, and technical language through...					
	situation-specific words and phrases ( <i>between those two black wires</i> )	an increasing number of words and phrases ( <i>Over there on the board?</i> )	a growing number of words and phrases in a variety of contexts ( <i>lightbulb went off, the electric circuit</i> )	an expanding number of words and phrases including idioms and collocations ( <i>push and pull, quit pulling my leg</i> )	a variety of words and phrases, such as adverbials of time, manner, and place; verb types; collocations; and abstract nouns ( <i>the invisible force between two magnets</i> )	a wide variety of words, phrases, and expressions with multiple meanings across content areas ( <i>electric shock versus I'm shocked</i> )

Image Source: 2020 Edition of WIDA ELD Standards Framework

To use the PLDs, educators must determine the mode of communication (i.e., whether they are assessing interpretative or expressive language) and select the corresponding set of descriptors. This determination will likely be made when the educator refines the language goals and integrates language and content in their instructional plans.

As part of the formative assessment process for a single task, educators will not likely draw on all dimensions of language at once. For instance, an exit ticket that asks students to produce two to three sentences would not be an appropriate language sample for assessing progress on organization of language. To adequately assess this discourse-level dimension of language, students would need authentic opportunities to demonstrate proficiency. An assessment item that calls for less than one paragraph or extended oral remarks, therefore, may not suffice for this purpose.

With that said, however, educators should work to promote integrated skills work in their classroom, whereby students have opportunities to draw on multiple language domains (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) at once. Although educators likely will not formatively assess all domains at once, students benefit instruction that does not cover the four language domains in isolation, as discrete coverage of individual domains does not reflect how we use language in everyday life.

### Putting this into Practice

#### Educators:

- **New to the WIDA ELD Standards?** Register for free self-paced eLearning through the WIDA Secure Portal. Contact your district's MLL director/coordinator to set up an account.
- **Getting started with the 2020 Edition?** Select one unit or content area, and work with colleagues to unpack the language demands necessary to engage in content-based practices from the unit. Use the language functions and proficiency level descriptors from the 2020 Edition to set learning goals and plan for formative language feedback.

#### Administrators:

- **Clarify expectations about WIDA ELD Standards alignment.** How should educators demonstrate alignment to the WIDA ELD Standards? How often will educators assess MLLs' content-driven language development? How will educators communicate the language goals for upcoming units to colleagues?
- **Develop systems (i.e., staff schedules, discussion prompts, data inquiry cycles) that support collaboration.** When are educators slated to co-plan and co-reflect on content-driven language development? Consider offering stipends to educators who engage in collaborative planning on non-contract hours.

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## Appendices

The following classroom walkthrough tools can work in tandem with content-specific tools in ELA, math, science, and social studies, along with other protocols, such as those for analyzing student data or reflecting on implementation of high-quality curricular materials. Personnel visiting classrooms should situate their observations within the context of the lesson or the school day and triangulate observations with other data, such as formative assessments from students or instructional plans. None of these tools were designed for evaluative purposes.

	Purpose	Potential Applications
<b>MLL Classroom Snapshot Tool</b>	To inform instructional coaching around integrated MLL instruction	MLL program evaluations District and school continuous improvement plans
<b>Academic Discourse Tool</b>	To inform schoolwide expectations around oral language use	MLL program evaluations District and school continuous improvement plans

### MLL Classroom Snapshot Tool

The MLL Classroom Snapshot Tool was created to support instructional coaching and self-reflection on the quality of MLL instruction happening in every classroom. The tool consolidates the HQIPs and indicators into a form for non-evaluative classroom observations. It was adapted from New York's Classroom Observation Tool and is intended to guide educators and administrators in conducting classroom walkthroughs focused on key components of high-quality core MLL instruction, such as integrated content and language goals.

All indicators need not be seen or heard in a single classroom visit, nor do the indicators represent an exhaustive list of evidence for demonstrating effective instruction. Rather, the indicators elevate a set of research-based criteria for observation, with the aim of centering subsequent discussion, reflection, and coaching around habits of learning associated with student agency. Although it may be unrealistic to expect all 20 indicators in one visit, we know MLLs benefit from instruction that affords them consistent access to these opportunities.

The focus on students in the indicators was designed to facilitate student-centered discussions. The use of student learning habits is not intended to downplay the role of educators and administrators in shaping students' educational experiences, nor is it intended to minimize other factors, such as district policies or public health infrastructure, that impact teaching and learning. Ultimately, the MLL Classroom Snapshot Tool should serve as a resource in data collection, as needed for local continuous improvement efforts.

## Academic Discourse Tool

The Academic Discourse Tool was designed to support educators and administrators in gathering data for reflection and coaching around classroom discourse. Together, the look-for's in the tool offer a snapshot of academic discourse in a classroom. The look-for's are intended to guide observations and provide a springboard for discussion; they were not designed for cumulative interpretations or use as a scorecard. For example, if educators use sentence frames instead of word banks to support academic discourse, that does not mean classroom discourse is less rich. If none of the look-for's are observed across multiple observations and data points, however, a discussion may be warranted about whether students have access to needed supports.

Rhode Island's understanding of academic discourse capitalizes on the ways youngsters naturally learn from one another in interaction. It is grounded in sociocultural learning theory, which underscores the role of social interaction in learning. It also draws on research about turn-taking structures developed through fields such as conversational analysis. This literature sheds light on how teachers might deviate from traditional structures for classroom discourse in order to cultivate more meaningful student-centered interaction in their classrooms, becoming 'guide on the side' rather than a 'sage on the stage.'

One common structure for classroom interaction is Initiate-Response-Feedback (IRF), whereby teachers initiate a line of discussion, students orally respond, and teachers then provide evaluative feedback. While such interactions may generate valuable feedback, IRF models are largely teacher-dominated and restrict student participation. That is why the tool underscores the importance of three-turn sequences—in which *students* share and their *peers* respond or give feedback—as one indicator of quality academic discourse. The focus is on three turns because the goal is for students to co-construct knowledge and build shared understanding, which is difficult to accomplish in two turns and without meaningfully revisiting the initial contribution.

### MLL Classroom Snapshot Tool

Using the High-Quality Instructional Practices to Reflect on MLL Instruction

Grade/Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Part of Lesson Observed:  Beginning  Middle  End

Number of Students/MLL Students: \_\_\_\_\_

Classroom Set-Up:  rows  pairs  small groups  other

**Directions:** Observe classroom interactions (teacher-student, student-student). Then, using the student-focused indicators below, consider how you observed the HQIPs in action. Please record evidence of what you saw and heard from students.

Opportunities to Learn	
Indicators: We can see & hear...	Evidence: If you check a box, note what you saw & heard.
<p><b>Clarity of Learning Goals</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students develop explicit content-driven language practices within disciplinary learning environments.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students demonstrate clear understanding of their goals for content and language learning, in alignment with grade-level standards.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students engage in contextualized language development focused on meaning-making and what students will use language to do.</li> </ul> <p><b>Student-Centered Engagement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students work productively through activities that promote higher-order thinking (e.g., hypothesizing, synthesizing, evaluating).</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students deconstruct rich grade-level texts in every class.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students participate in purposeful, deliberately sequenced tasks to build conceptual understanding and fluency with core disciplinary skills.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students make connections between disciplinary concepts and develop capacity to apply analytical reasoning to new situations.</li> </ul> <p><b>Academic Discourse</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students (co)construct knowledge by sustaining oral discussions and collaborative learning with discipline-specific discourse moves.</li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students grapple with open-ended questions and demonstrate voice and confidence in their spoken interactions.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students take part in content-based tasks that embed ample opportunities to authentically practice new academic language.</li> </ul>	
<b>Asset-Based Stance</b>	
<b>Indicators:</b> We can see & hear...	<b>Evidence:</b> If you check a box, note what you saw & heard.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students use their home language(s) and communicative traditions to learn content.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students position themselves as sources of knowledge by making connections to prior learning and familial or community experiences.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students welcome diverse perspectives and have structured opportunities to share aspects of their identities in the classroom.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students interact with culturally responsive and sustaining texts and participate in instructional activities that honor their lived experiences.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students advocate for culturally responsive and sustaining education.</li> </ul>	
<b>Formative Assessment</b>	
<b>Indicators:</b> We can see & hear...	<b>Evidence:</b> If you check a box, note what you saw & heard.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students produce a range of work samples designed to demonstrate discipline-specific understandings and related language development.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students interpret regular content-driven language feedback in diverse mediums and environments.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students set goals for their grade-level content and language learning and track their progress with collaborative adult support.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students collaborate in flexible data-informed groups and give respectful, constructive peer feedback with language that is modeled and scaffolded.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students self-select learning strategies that capitalize on their strengths.</li> </ul>	



### Academic Discourse Tool

Number of Students/MLL Students: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of Observation: \_\_\_\_\_

Classroom Set-Up:  rows  pairs  small groups  other

Part of Lesson Observed:  Beginning  Middle  End

<p><b>Integrated Learning Goals for Language and Content:</b></p>    <p><b>Breakdown of Student Talk:</b></p> <p>How many students spoke? Select one.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Nearly all</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Most</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Some</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Little to none</li> </ul> <p>What participation structures are used during your visit? Select all that apply.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> T-S</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> T-SS</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> S-S</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> S-SS</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> SS-SS</li> </ul>	<p><b>Quality of Academic Discourse:</b></p> <p>Which best describes what you hear? Select one.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students elaborate and co-construct new understandings by engaging in three or more turns that build upon each other.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students respond by making connections to what peers have said, adding evidence or providing counterexamples.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students share their thinking orally or engage with the prompt using visual representations or realia.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students for the most part do not engage with the prompt.</li> </ul> <p>How does discourse align to and extend content learning? Select all that apply.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students center conversations around standards-aligned learning goals.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students sustain spoken interactions across multiple turns.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students ground their thinking in content knowledge and textual evidence.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Students engage in open-ended inquiries and critical thinking about disciplinary ideas.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Classroom Structures for Academic Discourse:</b></p> <p>Which scaffolds are available to students? Select all that apply.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Student groups are flexible and strategic (e.g., based on proficiency data or home language).</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Participation structures lay out clear roles and discussion norms.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Sample roles:</b> facilitator, timekeeper, resource manager, recorder, reporter</li><li>• <b>Sample norms:</b> attributing ideas, citing evidence, waiting until all have spoken before speaking again, respectfully disagreeing</li></ul></li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Students have wait time and opportunities to prepare for discussions.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Students use interpretive language strategies.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Note-taking or annotating</li><li>• Looking at the speaker</li><li>• Nodding or physically orienting to the speaker</li></ul></li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Students establish or maintain an academic register with support.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sentence frames</li><li>• Language walls</li><li>• Word banks</li></ul></li></ul>	<p><b>What are students saying? How does it connect to and support rigorous content learning?</b></p>
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