

Introduction

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) began its review of the *Kansas Curricular Standards for English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), 2004* by accepting ESOL Standards Committee member nominations that were solicited in October of 2008. By December, 25 committee members were selected to serve on the committee, along with two KSDE program consultants. The criteria used in selecting members included recommendations from peers, representation of rural and urban districts, all grade levels (including Pre-Kindergarten through post-secondary), all content areas, and all Kansas State Board of Education districts. Work to review the ESOL Standards began in February 2009 by examining recent research, nationally recognized standards, current and developing standards from other states, and Kansas content curricular standards. A twelve-member steering committee met during the summer and fall of 2009 to draft necessary revisions. By February 2010 a draft was posted on the KSDE website to solicit public input and feedback. Editing, formatting, and refining continued during the remainder of the year, instructional examples were added, and assessed indicators were discussed. A final draft was presented to the Kansas State Board of Education in February 2011. The standards were adopted at the March 2011 meeting.

The purpose of this document is to identify the ESOL standards that English learners (ELs) will be expected to master and provide a means to determine the progress of English language development. The standards focus on the language, its components and structure, and the communication skills that ELs need to access and understand the content curriculum and subject matter. These standards were written with the content standards and the Common Core Standards in mind and are to be used in conjunction with those standards. They are not meant to take the place of other standards; they are different from the others in terms of purpose and function. These standards are to be used by regular content area teachers as well as ESOL teachers to guide districts in planning local curricula, instruction, and assessments. They will serve as the basis for the development of state assessments in English language proficiency. However, this document is not a state-mandated curriculum. It does not provide lesson plans and does not present domains, clusters, or standards in any particular chronological order.

KANSAS ESOL STANDARDS DOCUMENT

The ESOL Standards document is composed of the four language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Within each domain are five to six clusters, or groups of related standards. Clusters are indicated within the document with a basic identification label such as “vocabulary”, “grammar”, “strategies”, or “comprehension of informational and literary texts.” The labels for the clusters appear in bold face in the Overview of Curricular Standards for English for Speakers of Other Languages. Within each cluster are one to eight standards - what students should be able to do with the language.

The Kansas K-12 ESOL standards are presented in five proficiency levels (Beginning, High Beginning, Intermediate, High Intermediate, and Advanced) which are based on those found in the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) English Language Proficiency Standards. The Pre-K standards are presented in three proficiency levels (Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced) to reflect the rapid increases in language development at that age. Descriptions of the five proficiency levels can be found in **Appendix A**. Proficiency levels indicate what could be expected of ELs and should be used to identify their current level of proficiency. The use and sophistication of vocabulary is one way that levels of proficiency are differentiated. For these vocabulary descriptions, refer to **Appendix B**. Another way that levels of proficiency are differentiated is through degrees and types of support needed. For further description of the degrees of support, refer to **Appendix C**.

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The grade groupings for the revised ESOL standards are Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K), 1, 2, 3, 4-5 and 6-12. For the first time, Pre-K standards were created in response to the fact that several districts serve English learners in Pre-K programs. The committee determined that language and literacy expectations for Pre-K through grade three change substantially enough from year to year that, in order to describe expectations with adequate specificity, those grade levels should each have their own standards. Grades 6-12 were grouped together because, as the committee worked through the process of writing the standards, they realized that the standards being developed were identical for grades 6-8 and grades 9-12. The critical difference between those grades is the sophistication of vocabulary and depth of content and semantic knowledge. The expectation is that although the standards remain the same, instruction and assessment for grades 6-8 would be differentiated from instruction and assessment for grades 9-12 by the appropriate increase in language complexity.

ABOUT ENGLISH LEARNERS

The number of English learners in our state increases every year and is expected to continue to increase. Over the past five years, the number of ELs in Kansas has nearly doubled. The current EL population is over 45,000—almost nine percent of the entire student population in 2011. Students are identified as ELs if they have a primary language other than English or have a language other than English in the home, and are not yet proficient in English as measured by an English language proficiency assessment.

English learners are a heterogeneous group, facing many challenges as they enter school. Language is but one of them. They come to Kansas from all over the globe (including from within Kansas), with various cultural norms, literacy levels, educational experiences, and dominant languages. No two English learners are alike, even within the same culture or country of origin. Some ELs are new to the U.S. and are unfamiliar with U.S. culture and the school system in particular. They may be refugees, recent arrivals, or international adoptees. This includes students whose schooling has been interrupted for a variety of reasons, including war, poverty, or patterns of migration, as well as students coming from remote rural settings. These students may exhibit pre- or semi-literacy in their native language and perform significantly below grade level. However, many other ELs were born in the U.S. or have been living in the U.S. for many years. These ELs may be more familiar with U.S. culture in general. In addition, some children may have English as the dominant or strongest language. For others, English is a second, third or fourth language. Regardless of the additional challenges they face, ELs are expected to achieve at the same high levels in the core academic subjects and meet the same challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards as all children, even though they may not have developed the English language skills or the vocabulary needed to function successfully at grade level in academic settings.

When students begin to learn English, they go through what is known as a “silent period.” They will be attentive and receptive, but will not produce much, if any, language. This silent period can last up to one year. When they begin producing language on their own they can be convincing in their fluency. They seem to be able to communicate very well, without searching for vocabulary, and sound near native-like in their intonation and fluency. However, in the field of second language acquisition, this is what is referred to as Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS). BICS refers to the aspects of language proficiency strongly associated with basic fluency in social interactions, including those that occur in a classroom, on the playground, or in the cafeteria. BICS is language that is informal and more dependent on face-to-face interaction, using gestures and concrete objects for reference. It is what might be referred to as the surface skills of listening or speaking. BICS generally develops within one to three years of exposure and practice with the new language.

In order to succeed in school, however, students need to know more than every day, social language. They also need to master the language used in the learning of academic content in formal schooling contexts. This includes aspects of language strongly associated with literacy and academic achievement, including specialized terms, technical language, speech registers, and general academic discourse. This language is known as Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). It is context-reduced language, having fewer non-verbal cues and more abstract

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language. CALP generally develops after five to nine years of exposure and practice with the language. CALP requires linguistic knowledge and literacy skills necessary for academic work in combination with social language needed for communication.

One common myth about learning a second language is that younger students will have a quicker and easier time of learning a new language, while older students will find it more difficult and require more time. Contrary to this assumption, younger students do not necessarily learn a second language easier or more quickly, as they are still in the early stages of learning their first language. Frequently, young ELs are expected to learn English before they have had time to fully develop their native language. For those ELs who are not provided with first language development support, there is risk of delaying language development in both languages. It is critical that ELs be supported in developing their native language as fully as possible and not be expected to replace their native language with their new language, if supports are available to maintain and develop their first language. Older students often do not have more difficulty learning a second language as they come with generally better developed first languages and can rely on background knowledge and experience in learning a new language. Skills they have already developed are an asset that can be used to learn the new language.

It is also important to remember that language learning is not a linear process. Sometimes it is two steps forward and one step back. Often language learners will master a skill, then lose it for a time, and use it again at a later time. Although some might argue for a specific order of language learning, whereby some grammatical structures must be learned before others can be mastered, this is not always the case. Also, the first language and level of mastery of that language must be considered before we can determine whether a particular structure or feature of English will be mastered or understood easily.

In addition, ELs come to the classroom with very diverse backgrounds and academic experiences. Many newcomer students are well educated and highly literate in their first language, while others may have experienced limited or interrupted formal education, resulting in significant gaps in content knowledge and literacy skills. Some enter school at a similar level to their non-EL classmates, having similar background knowledge and formal education, ready to engage in the curriculum. Others may not have previous experience with formal schooling, written language skills (either due to the lack of schooling or the fact that their language is not a written language), or a point of reference for content area topics.

Adolescent newcomers (older students entering a U.S. school for the first time) may find themselves either ahead of or behind the lessons that are being taught. Students with limited formal schooling (LFS), also known as Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE), are generally recent arrivals to the United States, whose backgrounds differ significantly from the school environment they are entering. Although not fully skilled in academics, these students possess valuable life skills that can serve as a basis for classroom learning. Instruction for this group should make use of native language when possible. Especially for these students, content lessons cannot be taught linearly; there is not enough time to begin with Kindergarten curriculum and wait for mastery before moving ahead to secondary curriculum. Likewise, language cannot be taught separate from the content; often it must be a simultaneous process. For students with no or limited literacy in any language, learning beginning reading skills such as alphabetic principles and basic phonics will be necessary. Standards that address these skills will not be found with the needed specificity of skills at the secondary level, but do exist in the earlier grades. Teachers who are working with adolescents needing basic literacy development are encouraged to look to the K-3 standards for guidance when planning instruction. These standards can also be used to guide beginning English literacy instruction for students who are literate in languages that do not use a Latin alphabet, such as Russian, Arabic, or Chinese.

Teachers should be explicit about the language demands of the content in their instruction. ELs do not have to wait to understand the language before the concept is introduced; they can learn language through content. They may already have knowledge about the concept but lack the language to talk about it. Teachers should consider the language proficiency of the student to determine the degree of support needed in order for

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the student to understand the lesson and the content objective. It is especially important for ELs to have access to reading material that is both interesting and comprehensible to them. They should not be underexposed to the content material and the academic language that they are expected to learn. Therefore, when planning lessons for ELs, there will be two objectives for each lesson: one for content and one for language. An instructional example template, as found in **Appendix D**, is designed to show how teachers can plan for explicit language instruction through content-based learning. It is the responsibility of all teachers to ensure that ELs have the language they need in order to meaningfully access the content curriculum they are expected to master.

The education of ELs is the responsibility of all teachers and staff. As ELs are in classes all day outside of the ESOL classroom, their education and success are not solely the responsibility of the ESOL teacher or the ESOL department. All staff should know their students' learning styles, background, and how to tap in to their prior knowledge in order to build on it and transfer it to what they are learning across all content areas.

Document Publication

This document is available on the [Kansas State Dept. of Education website](http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=4694) at <http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=4694>.