Early Childhood Guidelines

for Multilingual Learners

Relevant Considerations for PK–2 in Early Literacy and Mathematics

Supporting Young Multilingual Learners in PK-2

The Early Childhood Guidelines for Multilingual Learners, developed by the English Learners Success Forum (ELSF), describes key concepts particular to instructional materials to support multilingual learners learning English in the early years of child development from preschool to 2nd grade. ELSF developed these guidelines and the K–12 Guidelines for Improving Core Materials for English Learners to provide specific guidance to instructional material developers on what should be built into curricula, units, modules, and lessons so that multilingual learners can access and engage with content learning. **These Early Childhood Guidelines are designed to be used alongside the K–12 guidelines, not as an independent document.**

The National Association of Educators of Young Children promotes intentional teaching and active, multi-modal learning for young children. Their core values instruct educators to: "Recognize that children are best understood and supported in the context of family, culture, community, and society. Respect the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of each individual (child, family member, and colleague). Respect diversity in children, families, and colleagues." This Early Childhood resource builds on these key values and identifies specific needs of young multilingual learners when learning literacy and mathematics. These guidelines foreground the need for culturally sustaining educational materials and practices that support the interconnected, dynamic development of young multilingual learners when learning literacy and mathematics. This resource emphasizes the role of oral language as a vehicle for all learning, in home language and English and its specific connection to literacy and mathematics for young multilingual children at child care settings, at home and all learning environments. It highlights the instructional practices needed to emphasize the connections to self before others, between home, familial background and experiences, and partnerships with families and care providers

Recommendations to Content Developers

Since many educators are underprepared to teach young multilingual learners in Pre-K through 2nd grade, content developers can improve their educational materials by incorporating the following research-based recommendations related to early mathematics and literacy instruction:

1. **Create purposeful, equitable, and consistent opportunities for all children to interact with one another and with the content they are learning.**

2. **Make play and routines a crucial part of the language development and learning process.**

3. **Use authentic concrete representations, manipulatives, and realia to support meaning making and language development.**

4. **Use mathematizing activities and practices that come from children, their families, and their communities.**

5. **Develop oral language as the foundation for language, literacy, and all learning**

These recommendations align with recent literature that highlights the importance of instruction that is equitable, focuses on understanding, centers on children's thinking, includes various activities, and leverages children's funds of knowledge. These recommendations support mathematics and literacy instruction by positioning young multilingual learners as thinkers and doers, while valuing their ideas and cultural practices as resources for learning.

A full description of these recommendations and a review of the empirical research from which they are drawn is available in the Research Background for the Early Childhood (PK–2) Supplement. See also Early Childhood Definitions and Examples from ELSF.

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Early Childhood Guidelines
for Multilingual Learners

The tables below represent the ELSF Early Childhood Guidelines for Multilingual Learners. Each table aligns with the 5 focus areas of the ELSF K–12 Guidelines and provides considerations for supporting multilingual learners in early childhood across mathematics and literacy. **These Early Childhood Guidelines are designed to be used alongside the K–12 guidelines, not as an independent document.**

Early Childhood Guidelines for Mathematics	
	Considerations for PK-2
Focus Area I *Interdependence of Mathematical Content, Practices, and Langauge*	• Instructional materials include guidance for teachers to reinforce mathematical language and concepts through the initial use of familiar concrete representations (e.g., pictures, cards, realia, and manipulatives) before moving to the unfamiliar. *(Focus Area I, Guideline 1)* • Instructional materials guide teachers to become aware of and integrate children's authentic encounters with mathematical concepts and language throughout daily routines, calendar and weather displays, and different types of play. *(Focus Area I, Guideline 1)* • Mathematics and language objectives are interconnected and connected to explicit speaking and listening opportunities for children. These connections are explicit and acknowledge interdisciplinary learning and the vital role of language within content learning. *(Focus Area I, Guideline 2)* • Instructional materials offer multiple ways for children to show understanding through language, action, and play (e.g., drawing, using objects, talk routines, and gestures) *(Focus Area I, Guideline 2)* • Instructional materials guide teachers to make content and language objectives transparent and comprehensible to children through multiple modes of communication and representation (e.g., multiple examples using modeling, visuals, illustrations, gestures, and verbal and written descriptions). *(Focus Area I, Guideline 2)* • Instructional materials illustrate and provide examples of children expressing their understanding through multiple modalities and different types of play and interaction (e.g., drawing, gestures, use of manipulatives, non–linguistic representations, and use of home language) and represent them as valuable ways for children to demonstrate learning. *(Focus Area I, Guideline 3)*

Focus Area II *Scaffolding and Supports for Simultaneous Development*	• Instructional materials provide multiple opportunities for children to build connections between concrete representations of numbers and mathematical symbols, words, and concepts through different types of play, actions and interactions, and during daily routines to scaffold and reinforce understandings. *(Focus Area II, Guideline 4)* • The materials guide teachers to intentionally use familiar and new concrete representations to support children as they build these new connections drawing from their own experiences and prior knowledge . *(Focus Area II, Guideline 4)* • Instructional materials give explicit guidance so that teachers can elicit and draw upon the mathematical language and practices children use during home and learning activities (including different types of play, centers, household chores, family activities, discussions, and daily routines). *(Focus Area II, Guideline 5)* • The materials provide multiple examples of how to mathematize the actions children are already doing (intentionally using mathematical terms, concepts, and practices in describing the play or activity). *(Focus Area II, Guideline 5)* • Instructional materials provide guidance for teachers to nurture children's understanding of mathematical language and content through the regular and familiar use of concrete and/or visual representations of mathematical concepts, as well as the use of home language and everyday ways of communicating. *(Focus Area II, Guideline 6)*
Focus Area III *Mathematical Rigor through Language*	• Instructional materials provide opportunities for mathematical practices, including,counting, playing with, designing, exploring, and measuring. Use of shapes, pattern blocks, sequencing, and sorting can indicate children's understanding of rigorous concepts without extensive language necessary. *(Focus Area III, Guideline 7)* • Instructional materials do not simplify or "water down" language, ideas or tasks and instead show teachers how to elicit, extend and build upon children's experiences and prior knowledge, and show teachers how to make use of children's language (home and familiar language) to access ideas and new language and language practices. *(Focus Area III, Guideline 8)* • Instructional materials provide examples and strategies for teachers to support learning using children's errors or unique expressions to uncover understandings and guide instruction. *(Focus Area III, Guideline 8)* To build language practices of young children, instructional materials can: *(Focus Area III, Guideline 9)* • *give specific guidance on how to structure and scaffold discussions (whole group, small group, one-on-one) that values all children's contributions and give them the opportunity to interact and build community.* • *guide teachers to elicit children's thinking about mathematical content that use and value authentic connections to children's lives through talk, drawings, gestures, and use of manipulatives.* • *guide teachers to establish varied participation norms that highlight the understandings and contributions of young multilingual learners in different languages.*

Focus Area IV *Leveraging Students' Assets*	• Instructional materials give teachers explicit guides and questions to elicit, uncover, observe mathematical practices from children's homes, communities, and everyday life. This includes uncovering examples from children and their communities about how children communicate about math and use math language (at home, play and other environments). Teachers are provided with suggestions for how to bring those into the learning environment to be shared and explored. *(Focus Area IV, Guideline 10)* • Play-based (guided play, free play, sociodramatic play, games) and exploratory activities are included in instructional materials with participation structures and authentic connections to children's cultural practices. Materials show teachers how to integrate games, interests, prior experience, and play-based learning activities from children's homes into the learning environment. *(Focus Area IV, Guideline 10)* • Teachers are given explicit guidance to elicit children's informal strategies, familiar language, familiar games, activities, and resources from home and children's culture, to be used for drawing, construction, and talking about mathematical representations. This broadens access and sustains cultural practices for young multilingual learners and positions them as competent in mathematics. *(Focus Area IV, Guideline 11)*
Focus Area V *Assessment of Mathematical Content, Practices, and Language*	• Assessment materials are designed to provide young multilingual learners with multiple opportunities to think, communicate, and exchange ideas about math, not just through a single output or focused on mastery. *(Focus Area V, Guideline 13)* • Children are provided with multiple ways to demonstrate learning through non-verbal communication, in addition to assessing children's specific use of math terms and language and their mathematical understanding that are the focus of instruction. *(Focus Area V, Guideline 13)* • Instructional materials highlight different ways to collect and monitor a variety of data across time and for all areas of development set in an authentic learning environment. Data collection and monitoring is integrated throughout everyday activities and routines, not just point-in-time assessments. *(Focus Area V, Guideline 13)* • Instructional materials show teachers how to track and use their observation of children's speaking and listening of math language to provide timely and developmentally appropriate feedback and set individual goals for learning and plan opportunities for practice and communication. *(Focus Area V, Guideline 14)* • Instructional materials include guidance for teachers on how to involve and collaborate with families in the formative assessment cycle, including recommendations for how to draw on a family's knowledge about their child and their progress and inviting family members to help conduct informal assessments at home and reinforce feedback to the child. *(Focus Area V, Guideline 14)*

Focus Area V *Assessment of Mathematical Content, Practices, and Language*	• Instructional materials provide teachers with structured guidance for formative assessments during observations of exploratory and play-based activities (guided, free, sociodramatic, scripted play) and various interactions (whole group, small group, one-on-one). Materials may include directions for the use of checklists, rating scales, anecdotal records taken while observing children to assess their learning. *(Focus Area V, Guideline 15)* • Materials provide guidance for teachers on how to use portfolios with teacher narrative and notes as a formative assessment to track children's progress throughout the year. *(Focus Area V, Guideline 15)*

Early Childhood Guidelines for English Literacy and Language Arts

Focus Area I *Interdependence of Oral Language and Early Literacy Activities* *Note: These guidelines are meant to be used with the Focus Area called "Interdependence of Oral language, disciplinary writing and text engagement" in the K-12 Guidelines*	**Relevant Considerations for PK-2** • Instructional materials position oral language development as an essential and foundational component of literacy learning. Materials include ample and consistent interactive oral language development activities that are integrated into different types of play, daily routines, and physical activities to build language. *(Focus Area I, Guideline 1)* • Literacy development activities consistently incorporate speaking and listening, an attention to alphabetic awareness, sound and symbol correspondence, phonemic awareness, fluency, and comprehension (not just one of these components in isolation). *(Focus Area I, Guideline 1)* • Activities connect children's early literacy to understanding words and ideas through large group, small group, and one-on-one discussions. *(Focus Area I, Guideline 1)* • Instructional materials show teachers how to explicitly and appropriately model the writing process, to make language and thinking visible to children by calling attention to the sounds and the choice of words, and how to build sentences to communicate ideas about the topics they are learning about. Teachers incorporate the children's own words, phrases, and sentences in English and other languages when they model writing (i.e., language experience approach). *(Focus Area I, Guideline 1)* • Interactive language development activities build opportunities for children to engage with texts through frequent read-alouds and group and one-on-one discussions about stories. Instructional materials include an array of stories, poems, songs, and finger play that children have multiple exposures to, and show how teachers can integrate texts for read-alouds or stories that come from children's homes and communities in English and in other languages. *(Focus Area I, Guidelines 3)* • Instructional materials include opportunities for multiple exposures to a text and repetition of sounds, words and language from songs and poems, including those from home, to support the development of language. *(Focus Area I, Guideline 1)*

Focus Area II *Sustained Language and Content Support*	• Instructional materials appropriately advance the development of children's language practices in English, using home language, as children develop deeper knowledge of interesting content, topics ,and themes connected to their home, everyday life, their communities, and the learning environment *(Focus Area II, Guideline 4)* • Instructional materials offer children consistent exposure and multiple opportunities over time to learn, hear, and use the sounds of the English language and new vocabulary that are intentionally connected to the meaning and purpose of the sounds and words. Materials provide opportunities for children to use the sounds and words to express ideas about the topic they are learning about, and in the context of different types of play activities, daily routines, and discussions. *(Focus Area II, Guideline 5)* • Instructional materials include play activities (such as guided, free, sociodramatic, scripted play), daily routine and tasks, in order to promote children's understanding of various topics, themes, and concepts in various texts (e.g., informational, narrative, imaginative) through the teaching of language. *(Focus Area II, Guideline 6)*
Focus Area III *Learner Awareness & Metacognitive Strategies*	• Instructional materials include opportunities for children to celebrate and engage in playful and creative use of language and spelling in English and their home language to support the development of metalinguistic awareness and cognitive development. *(Focus Area III, Guideline 8)* • Instructional materials include interactive activities that involve children's thinking about and noticing words, phrases and the meaning of language they hear and use during play, daily routines, and discussions, and use these opportunities to build vocabulary and semantic associations among related words and phrases. *(Focus Area III, Guideline 9)* • Instructional materials guide teachers to engage children in learning activities that bring awareness to how they use language with different audiences, including awareness of the sounds of English and their home language. Materials indicate to teachers how to draw children's attention to their own word choices that they make in speaking during different types of play, daily routines, and discussions. *(Focus Area III, Guideline 9)*

Focus Area IV *Leveraging Students' Assets*	• Instructional materials give teachers explicit guides and questions to elicit, uncover, and observe language and communication practices from children's homes, communities, and everyday life. This includes uncovering examples from children and their communities about how children use language and literacy at home and during different types of play (including songs, poems, phrases, stories, and words). Teachers are provided with suggestions for how to bring those into the learning environment to be shared and explored. *(Focus Area IV, Guideline 11)* • Play-based (guided, sociodramatic, or scripted play) and exploratory activities are included in instructional materials with familiar participation structures and authentic connections to children's cultural practices. Materials also show teachers how to integrate games, interests, prior experiences and play-based learning activities from children's home and communities into the learning environment. *(Focus Area IV, Guideline 11)* • Teachers are given explicit guidance to elicit children's informal strategies, familiar language, familiar games and activities, and resources from home and children's culture to be used for learning about various topics in efforts to support equitable access and sustain cultural practices for young multilingual learners. *(Focus Area IV, Guideline 11)*
Focus Area V *Formative Assessment*	• Instructional materials should guide teachers to formatively assess children's oral language abilities in the context of play, daily routines, and interaction with peers. Summative assessments should include experiential or performance-based activities such as group work, presentations, and projects that assess all modalities of language *(Focus Area V, Guideline 14)* • Instructional materials provide tools that help teachers give feedback on children's use of oral language in conversation, during different types of play, and throughout routines and activities. This includes examples and strategies for teachers to use children's language or invented spelling as a way to uncover understanding and guide instruction *(Focus Area V, Guideline 14)* • Assessment activities help teachers to accurately assess children's development of separable component reading and writing skills for the age group by attending to the considerations for literacy development among young multilingual learners. These include the ability to hear and apply different sounds in the English language, recognition of cognates, or awareness of differences between English and home language. *(Focus Area V, Guideline 14)* • Assessment results should show teachers how to determine when children need support in learning concepts, practices, and/or oral language to express their ideas. Assessments should help teachers identify where support for cross-linguistic awareness is needed *(Focus Area V, Guideline 14)*