



WHAT EVERY INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER NEEDS TO KNOW: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING MULTILITERACY

THE OFFICE OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION AND WORLD LANGUAGES
BRIEF 6



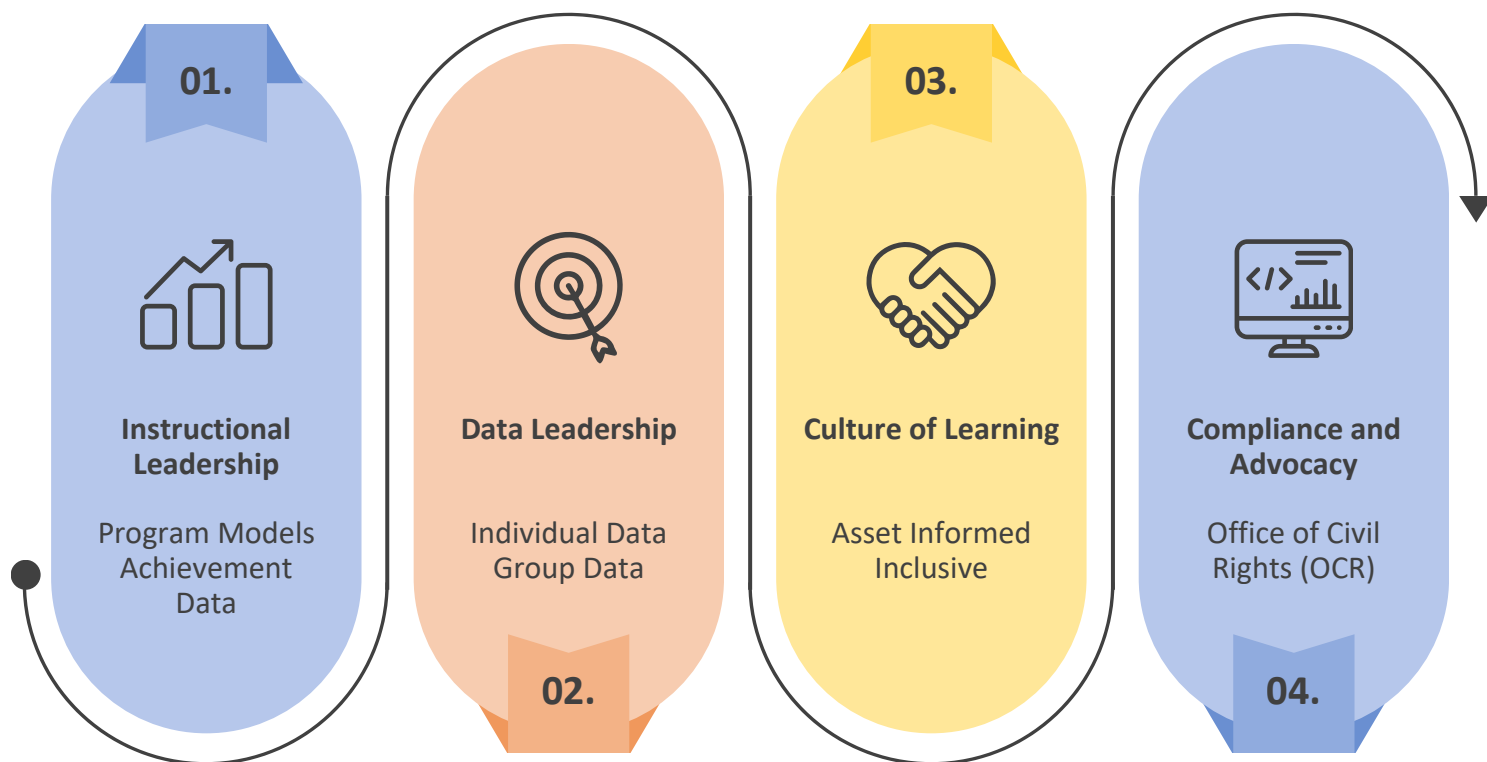
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Targeted Arenas of Educational Leadership

This BRIEF has been compiled to assist school leaders serving English Language Learners (ELLs) and multilingual learners (MLs) in their setting. Effective leaders promote supportive learning environments for both students and staff. Measurable positive outcomes occur within all groups.





Instructional Leadership

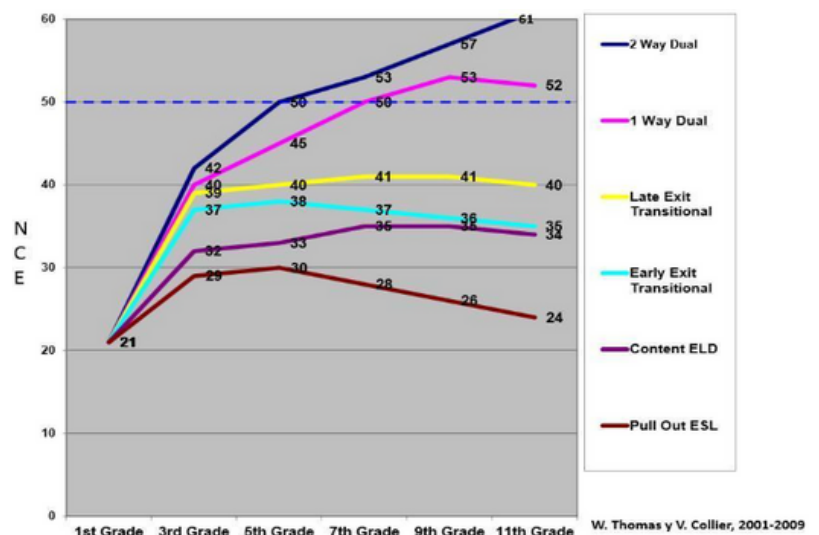
Instructional Leadership

A core responsibility of school leaders is to assure that the manner and content of teaching align with research and practice known to provide students optimal opportunities to learn (Callahan et al., 2023; Oliver, 2023). Toward that end, leaders must bear in mind the differences between what a program or curriculum touts as ‘effective for all’ and what decades of targeted research has shown to be effective with ELLs (see “Leadership Action Step #2” in Science of Reading: Leading for Literacy).

Studies on the achievement patterns of ELLs repeatedly reveal correlation between the types of programs in which ELLs are enrolled and their long-range academic outcomes. Perhaps the most well-known of these is the seminal longitudinal study by Wayne Thomas and Virginia Collier (1997, 2002). One of the most startling findings was that ELLs receiving standalone English as a New Language instruction achieved at only the 12th percentile in English reading by the time they finished high school. This was also the group most likely to drop out of school prior to ever reaching that point. Studies also reveal that ELLs in English-only classes are most at risk of incorrectly being referred to special education. Although these students likely experience more time exposed to English, loss of their L1 (home language) paired with unaccommodated immersion results in lower acquisition of English in addition to hampered achievement (Callahan & Gándara, 2014; Umansky & Reardon, 2014).

By contrast, students who have been enrolled in bilingual programs often demonstrate grade-level achievement in English by fifth grade. Dual Language Immersion (DLI) programs garner the highest achievement results with all groups of students exceeding the average academic performance of English-only speakers by the time they enter middle school (García et al., 2017; Umansky et al, 2016).

These studies suggest that **the status of being a second language learner is not the determining characteristic leading to school failure or success.** There is, instead, ample evidence of a much stronger correlation between the type of instruction ELLs receive and their long-term outcomes in school (Callahan & Gándara, 2014).





Data Leadership

Data Leadership

In stewarding achievement, leadership positions compel attention to data (e.g., indicators of achievement, behavior, attendance) and responsibility for decisions and actions ‘driven’ by that data. For indicators to meaningfully inform interpretation and response they must be contextualized by the student and their interaction with the instruction and means used to assess their learning: what is being measured, by what measure, under what conditions, and in comparison to whom? Such considerations are especially true in areas of behavior and achievement. Data leaders are frequently involved in discussions with the power to significantly impact individuals, groups, and school-wide success. What insights can leaders bring to consideration of data generated around ELLs? (Datnow & Park, 2014; Institute of Education Sciences, 2021)

Individual Data: School protocols that support problem-solving around individual student’s needs must consider that the individual student provides the primary context and that situations will vary based on the student. All other phenomena and measures are triangulated by the experiences and capacities (seen and unseen) of this student.

To what extent have the teaching methods and materials allowed this student to connect with content and skills?

Do assessments presume sameness of life and language outside of school?

Do assumptions of *universality* impede this student from showing the depth and breadth of what they know and can do?

Are accommodations provided to address this concern?

Are those accommodations effective?

Because it is not unusual for ELLs to underperform in some models, school teams run risks of inappropriately (a) disregarding results as ‘typical’, or conversely (b) considering them valid indicators of learning disability. Both types of **decision error result from disregard of the student’s personal, linguistic, and cultural assets**. Of longer-term significance, neither assumption leads to the type of problem-solving needed to determine the trajectory changing conditions under which this student does succeed (Eisenman & Ferretti, 2010; Klingner et al., 2006).

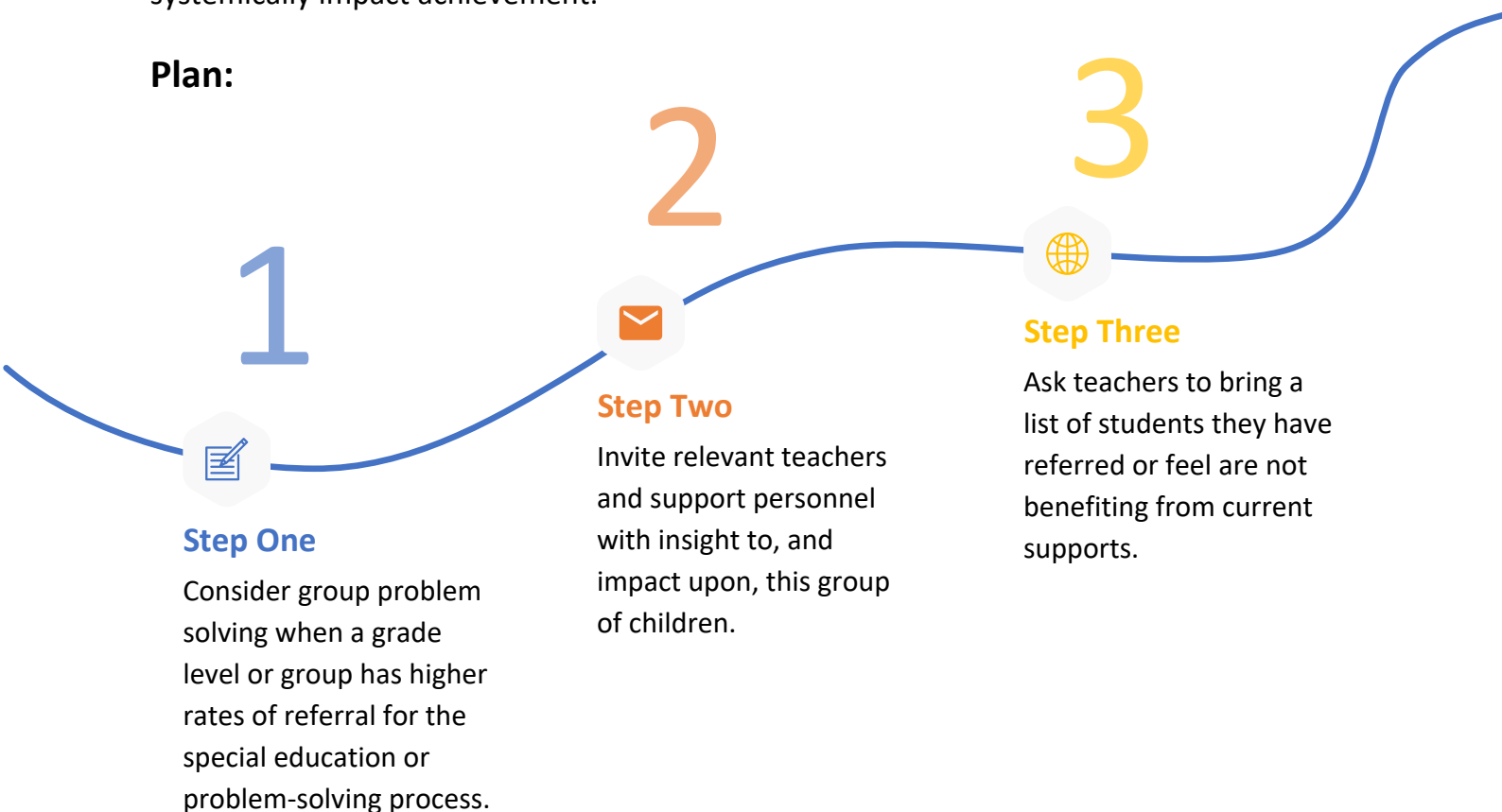
“The Problem-Solving Process helped us identify strategies that promoted student achievement by forming a team to brainstorm solutions, modify instruction, and instructional strategies before moving to the Special Education testing process. Those that were identified as needing special education services were placed with strategies and a plan!”
- Elementary Principal

Group Data: Schools leaders are frequently involved in, and responsible for, decisions around data reflecting the performance of groups, grades, and the entire school. How such data is interpreted has the potential to reinforce both negative and positive trends of the data. This is especially true of ELLs for whom standard instruction and materials prove an inadequate fit (Billings & Mueller, 2017).

For example, a cohort of second graders perform poorly on decoding despite instructional emphasis on phonics. The screening data also indicates that students do not always recognize sounded-out words. Reflective leaders realize that these are common phenomenon for ELLs whose brains have the most experience with words distributed across multiple languages. They likely know as many words as their monolingual English-speaking peers, just not the same ones assumed by the curriculum. Devoid of context, this data can relegate ELLs to structured interventions for vocabulary and decoding, when what they really need are increased opportunities to hear, speak and meaningfully connect language(s) while continuing to learn and collaborate with grade-level peers (Calderón et al, 2011; Goldenberg, 2010).

As with individual problem-solving, there is no ‘recipe’ for what needs be added or adjusted without accounting for the flavors already present. That stated, it is not reasonable and probably not effective to approach group data as a set recipe for what to ‘add’. The following visual describes steps leaders can take to not only improve data but systemically impact achievement.

Plan:



Do:

First

Teachers share concerns for each student on their list

Second

As teachers share, invite clarification about how the concern is described

Third

Add new concerns to list and add tally marks to those already represented

Fourth

Invite individual reflection on any emerging themes

Fifth

Select area to impact an identified theme. (i.e. expressive language, answering questions)

Leverage

Having identified a commonality among concerns, group members will be ready to, as suggested by Díaz-Sacco & Muñoz-Salinas (2024) and Tobin et al. (2024):

- Brainstorm ways in which 1-2 themes can be ‘bumped’ up throughout the school day and/or across settings.
- Think about current routines and practices. What adjustments might increase opportunities to *authentically use or develop* related skills? For example,
 - Teachers determine the focus and share ideas.
 - Discuss how or when the group will reflect on the impact of ‘tweaks’ to routines and practice.

Reflection

Discuss the pros and cons of leveraging/enhancing current practices over adding another curriculum or intervention to students’ and teacher’s day.



Culture of Learning

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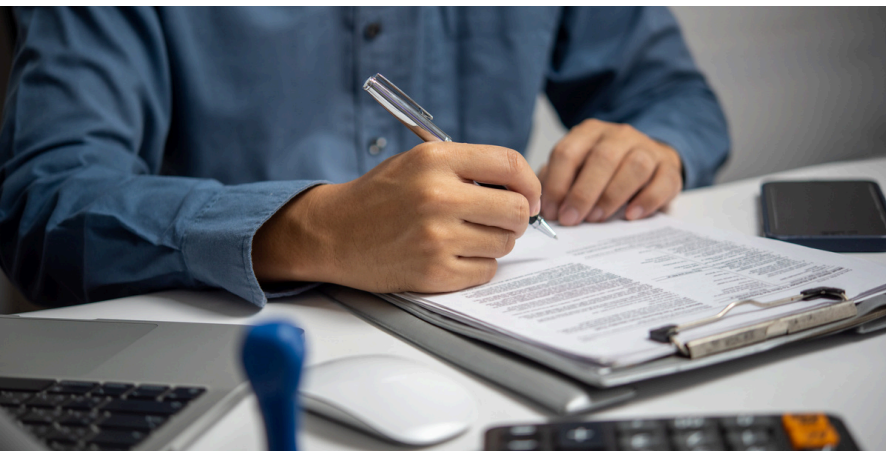
Effective school leaders also model and support a culture of learning. While not each will possess the content or grade-level expertise to model specifics, every leader can foster the attitudes and practices associated with *schools that learn*. These are not simply schools that show achievement gains or high return of climate surveys. Schools with a learning culture recognize, maximize, and grow from ongoing involvement of the individuals, grades, families, and communities it serves (Dinsdale, 2017; Mincu, 2022).

The State of New York has identified 4 Principles of Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education:

1. A welcoming and affirming environment
2. High expectations and rigorous instruction
3. Inclusive curriculum and assessment
4. Ongoing professional learning

See more at via [NYSED.gov](https://www.nysed.gov). Operationalized for systemic growth, each of these principles necessitates consideration of asset drivers, inclusion, and reflection.





Compliance and Advocacy

Compliance and Advocacy

School leaders have many areas of responsibility and, within each, opportunities for advocacy. This may not occur when compliance is reduced to flow charts and checklists. These tools provide guidance but don't compel reflection on the reason those actions and considerations matter (Hopkins et al., 2024; Norman & Eslami, 2021).

This is of particular concern with laws in place to preserve the rights of ELLs. Among these are those stipulated by the US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR).

Office of Civil Rights (OCR)

OCR enforces laws that prohibit discrimination in programs or activities that receive Federal funds from the Department of Education. Discrimination may be found to occur on the basis of race, national origin, gender, disability, and age. This includes the identification, assessment, placement, monitoring, and evaluation of ELLs. The OCR determines if districts are providing appropriate services to ELLs by asking:

1. Does the adopted approach/program foster English language development and meaningful program participation for 'ELL' students?
2. How does the district identify all students potentially needing ELL services?
3. Is each potential ELL student assessed for English language proficiency?
4. Does the district provide its ELLs with a program of services consistent with its chosen educational approach?
5. Does the district provide the resources necessary to implement its educational approach?
6. Has the district established criteria for exiting ELLs from ELL Services?
7. Does the district ensure that students exited from the ELL program have an opportunity to meaningfully participate in the education program, whereby proficiency = success?
8. Has the district developed evaluation procedures to periodically evaluate and revise its ELL program?

These questions reflect guidance from multiple sources, including Melnick (2023), the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (2015), and Zirkel (2021).

Implementation of group level problem solving described in this BRIEF is one way to ensure patterns of faulty programming are caught and addressed to avoid non-compliance with outcomes-evident bias within systems.

Adapted from: "Ensuring English Learner Students Can Participate Meaningfully and Equally in Educational Programs"



Reflect and Apply

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- Describe the program model relied upon most for serving ELL students in your school.
 - What long term academic outcomes are correlated with this model?
 - What social, vocational, and economic outcomes could result for the students, school, and community at large?
- The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) provides guidelines to districts and schools for doing what is legally appropriate. However, we can meet the law and yet not do what is educationally sound for our culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) student populations.
 - How can educational leaders use the laws that support ELLs to advocate for the personal and material resources needed to be in compliance with the language and spirit of each law?



Key References & Resources

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The Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages

THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
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