



From Fragmentation to Integration: Implementing WIDA ELD Standards in Riverbend Area Schools

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Abstract

This case study describes Riverbend Area School District's (pseudonym) efforts to implement the WIDA English Language Development (ELD) Standards to achieve educational equity for Multilingual Learners (MLs) in collaboration with Cooperative Educational Service Agency 2 (CESA 2) in Wisconsin. The paper addresses how traditional English Learner (EL) programs often inadequately address MLs' needs, leading to fragmented learning experiences and missed opportunities for grade-level engagement. With the adoption of the new edition of the WIDA ELD Standards, the district recognized their power to provide a framework for integrating language development into mainstream education, fostering ML student participation in disciplinary practices such as constructing claims with evidentiary reasoning. This systemic shift required the district to redefine the role of language standards in education of ML students to promote integration of language in the service of learning across all subjects, starting with math. The district encountered several challenges, including the marginalization of EL students and securing teacher buy-in which were tackled through targeted and sustained professional development, involvement of district leadership, and strategic collaboration across teams. This study highlights the importance of the ELD Standards in standardizing language expectations for disciplinary learning and underscores the need for a structured implementation approach to achieve sustained change and equitable outcomes for MLs.

“Changing demographics and widening gaps necessitate changes in state and national requirements, and calls for a re-evaluation of how schools provide equitable access and learning opportunities for MLs.”



Introduction

Traditional EL program models have not effectively met the needs of MLs (Morita-Mullaney, Renn, & Chiu, 2020; Thomas & Collier, 2002). In these models, EL teachers are typically tasked with working with MLs in ways that may foster dependency, isolate or segregate students, and restrict access to high-quality or grade-level content. Changing demographics and widening gaps necessitate changes in state and national requirements, and calls for a re-evaluation of how schools provide equitable access and learning opportunities for MLs. The most recent edition of the WIDA English Language Development (ELD) Standards offers a framework that addresses these inequities, promoting a shift from specialized language support to integrated language instruction for participating in disciplinary practices such as constructing claims and engaging in evidentiary reasoning within mainstream classrooms. This shift requires a systemic change, redefining the role of language in education for all students.

As the WIDA ELD standards pertain to language development and schools, and districts are held accountable for language growth, the responsibility of understanding and applying these standards often falls to EL specialists or coordinators. Although EL specialists may be well-versed in traditional language teaching methods, they may not necessarily possess the essential knowledge of standards, disciplinary practices or the skills and time required to enhance their expertise in this area or practice these skills in ways that support others. Consequently, the new standards place new requirements and new ways of working and supporting students and classroom teachers.

Marginalization of the EL Services and Language Standards



The efforts to implement the WIDA ELD Standards are significantly challenged by the relatively lower status of language standards compared to the NGSS, CCSS, or other national academic standards. Research by Menken and García (2010) highlights that language education standards often receive less attention and resources, which can impede the effective implementation of initiatives designed to support English Learners (ELs). This disparity in perceived importance and administrator lack of knowledge lead to a lack of prioritization, which is evident in the allocation of funding, professional development opportunities, and instructional time dedicated to EL education (Menken & García, 2010).

The problem is further exacerbated by the systemic marginalization of EL teachers and ML students. In many states, EL services are underfunded and under-resourced (Morita-Mullaney, Renn, & Chiu, 2020; Ramirez, Carpenter, & Breckenridge, 2014; Sugarman, 2016). This marginalization is deeply rooted in the broader socio-political landscape, particularly the contentious politics of immigration. García and Kleifgen (2018) discuss how immigration

policies and societal attitudes towards immigrants influence the perception and treatment of ML students in schools. Despite the legal protections afforded to EL education and ML students through landmark cases such as *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) and legislative measures like the Civil Rights Act of 1964, these protections often fail to translate into equitable educational practices and resource allocation (García & Kleifgen, 2018).

“ML students often navigate educational environments that are not fully inclusive or responsive to their linguistic and cultural needs, impacting their academic performance and overall educational experience.”

Moreover, the marginalization of EL services is not just a matter of policy neglect but also involves a complex interplay of societal attitudes and institutional biases. Research by Valdés, Capitelli, and Alvarez (2011) indicates that EL teachers frequently face professional isolation, limited professional development opportunities, and inadequate support from school leadership. These conditions hinder their ability to advocate for and implement effective language instruction practices. Furthermore, ML students often navigate educational environments that are not fully inclusive or responsive to their linguistic and cultural needs, impacting their academic performance and overall educational experience (Valdés, Capitelli, & Alvarez, 2011).

The compounded challenges of sustaining meaningful change in the implementation of WIDA ELD Standards also highlight the need for a more integrated approach to educational standards. According to de Jong and Harper (2005), recognizing the intrinsic value of language development as foundational to academic success across all disciplines is crucial. This approach involves integrating language development goals with content standards to ensure that ML students are not only learning English but also mastering academic content simultaneously (de Jong & Harper, 2005).

“By addressing these systemic issues and advocating for policy changes, educators and policymakers can work towards a more inclusive and effective educational environment for ML students.”

To persist in working towards equity for MLs through high-quality instruction in the classrooms where ELs spend most of their day, it is imperative to elevate the status of WIDA ELD Standards within the educational hierarchy and ensure that the ELD Standards receive the necessary attention, resources, and respect they deserve within the broader educational system and are an integral part of instruction and assessment. By addressing these systemic issues and advocating for policy changes, educators and policymakers can work towards a more inclusive and effective educational environment for ML students.



Adoption of the WIDA 2020 ELD Standards in Wisconsin



The WIDA ELD Standards Framework, 2020 edition was published in December 2020, and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction officially adopted the standards in May 2021. The spring of 2021 is also when the Riverbend EL department began their journey with the ELD Standards. In November 2023, the Wisconsin DPI ELDS Rollout Brief was published, requiring all districts to officially adopt a set of ELD standards. “Over the next three years, DPI will work to ensure that districts serving English Learners...have the support needed to develop and execute a plan for implementing them” (Wisconsin DPI English Language Development Standards Timeline, p. 9).

The WIDA 2020 English Language Development Standards Framework plays a crucial role in promoting equity of opportunity and access for Wisconsin’s multilingual learners by providing a comprehensive, consistent, and a rigorous approach to language education. Beyond a more traditional approach to language teaching that puts the learning of the language before or in place of delving into rigorous academics, this framework emphasizes the importance of integrating language development with academic content for the purpose of meaning making, ensuring that multilingual learners are supported in achieving both language proficiency and academic success. By focusing on Key Language Uses, having a common set of Language Expectations, and guiding students’

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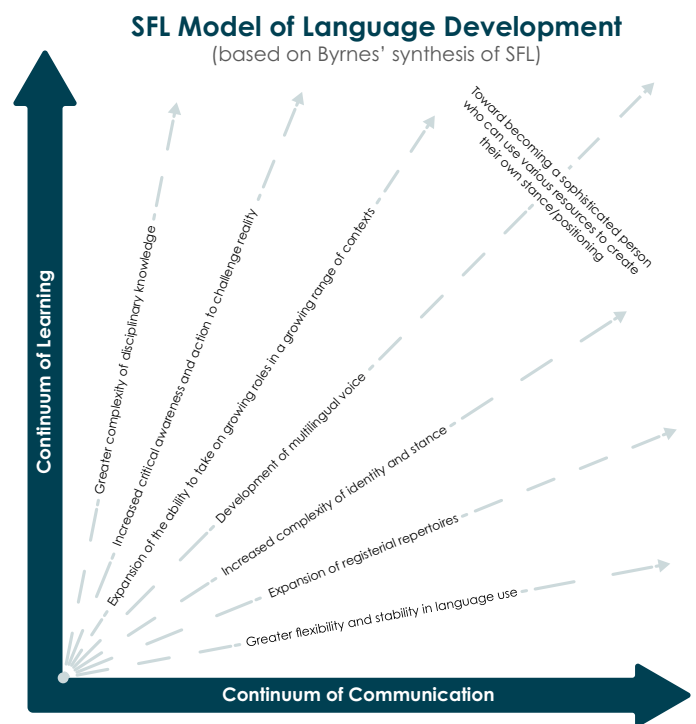
language development with Proficiency Level Descriptors, the WIDA ELD Standards Framework helps educators provide rigorous educational opportunities for ML students. Specifically, it helps them to be more intentional about creating instruction focusing on grade-level learning such as constructing explanations of how or why something works or communicating claims with textual evidence among others. This ensures that multilingual learners have equal access to rigorous educational opportunities, thereby fostering an inclusive learning environment that values and leverages their linguistic assets. The framework’s emphasis on collaboration among educators, families, and communities further supports the holistic development of multilingual learners, promoting educational equity and excellence.

The Role of ELD Standards in Language Education



to expand what we can do with language” (p. 20). From this perspective, then, “When children learn other languages, then their language development is the development of their multilingual voice, an increased complexity of identity and stance, and their positioning and ability to take on a variety of roles in a growing range of contexts (Byrnes, 2013)” (Figure 1). This view of language can help administrators and teachers see the connection between language and equity where language is not just a list of vocabulary words to be learned but a tool with which students can act upon the world.

Figure 1. *SFL Model of Language Development*



The new framework brings home the motto “Every teacher is a language teacher” which means that learning and language are inseparable. It reinforces the concept that every teacher is responsible for teaching the language of their content area as a tool for accessing and communicating their learning. However, many teachers are unsure and have an inconsistent understanding of what that means and how to do it. In a synthesis of STEM teachers’ perceptions on language demands, it was found that most teachers did not attend to the language of disciplinary demands (Bianchini, 2018). Some teachers defined language as vocabulary, while math teachers found their discipline to be devoid of language. In her study, even those teachers who believed that language played a central role in learning their discipline, there was a mismatch between their belief and practice, and they continued to privilege content over language.

The WIDA ELD Standards define language as “a dynamic system used by particular communities for communicating with others. The choices we make with language enable us to accomplish many purposes (e.g., to represent experiences, share ideas, to enact roles and relationships, and act upon the world)” (WIDA ELD Standards Framework, 2020 edition, p. 20). Language development is defined as “an interactive social process that occurs over time

“It is the teachers’ role to guide every student through academic discourse by introducing them to the language of disciplinary genres, content concepts, and language that may be entirely new to them.”

Guided by this definition of language and language development, the WIDA Standards provide a concrete and consistent way of defining what we mean by language instruction to ensure that Multilingual Learners have access to the same rigorous academic language instruction as their non-EL peers to enable students’ participation by engaging in the Language Expectations (e.g., construct and interpret science arguments or explanations) derived from the content area tasks.

All MLs should be constructing science or math explanations, critiquing claims and supporting them with evidence, and it is the teachers’ role to guide every student through academic discourse by introducing them to the language of disciplinary genres, content concepts, and language that may be entirely new to them. With the integration of language standards aligned with academic standards, it becomes easier to identify the language demands, functions and features of academic tasks. EL teachers bring expertise in language development, while classroom teachers excel in their subject matter. Collaboratively, they can design lessons that merge content learning with the development of the particular language tied to that content, fostering the development of expressive and interpretive language skills for all students across all subject areas.



District Context



Riverbend Area School District is a home to a diverse student body representing students with various global and local experiences. During the 2023-2024 academic year, total district student enrollment was approximately 8,600 with 7.7% of that population receiving English language services. Thirty-seven percent of those MLs had refugee backgrounds and limited or interrupted formal education with over 200 of those students arriving within the past five years. Over 60 home languages were represented throughout the district, with the highest representation being Hmong, Spanish, Swahili, and Arabic. The EL department staff comprised a program coordinator, 24 teachers, 9 bilingual paraprofessionals, 11 part-time interpreters, 3 multicultural outreach staff, and 7 refugee youth mentors.

The impetus for implementing the ELD Standards in Riverbend was precipitated by the fact that many ML students had not been able to exit the EL program, resulting in a “long-term” EL status (LTEL). Specifically, more than 60% of the EL population consisted of advanced English learners (ACCESS ELP levels 3 and 4) and were not able to be reclassified as former MLs and were “stuck” at levels of language proficiency 3 and 4 regardless of length of years spent receiving EL services. Socially, MLs at this level of proficiency can hold their own

in conversation, but academically their language is not progressing. This has significant consequences for students as they progress through the grades, limited access to more rigorous courses and post-secondary opportunities. The district recognized that students needed exposure to more rigorous academic and grade-level content. Given the lack of LTEL students’ progress in language development and the opportunity the standards provided to accelerate their achievement through language expectations delineated in the WIDA ELD standards, the district recognized that they offered a consistent framework for providing access to academic language students needed to make progress. Additionally, these standards made the language of content area genres and tasks more visible, enabling educators to design lessons that seamlessly integrate language learning associated with the subject matter based on that language visibility.

The LTEL student data drove the urgency to close the opportunity gap using ELD Standards in science, social studies, mathematics, and English Language Arts for English Learners. When standards were integrated into lesson planning, the district also recognized the potential benefits in improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, and other students who needed more explicit instruction.

Implementation Science



Implementation science is the study of how practitioners take up educational innovations such as a new set of standards of curricular materials. Drawing on the research by the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN), this field emphasizes the importance of structured and systematic approaches to ensure successful implementation (Fixsen, Blase, Naoom, and Wallace, 2009). Implementation drivers are key components that ensure the successful application of new practices. These drivers are divided into three categories: competency drivers, organization drivers, and leadership drivers.

Innovations are, by definition, new ways of work. New ways of work are disruptive to practitioners and organizations that must change in modest or radical ways to accommodate and support the high fidelity and effective use of an innovation by practitioners. Competency drivers, organization drivers, and leadership drivers guide the work of implementation in any organization.

-Active Implementation Research Network, Implementation Drivers

Competency drivers focus on the selection, training, and coaching of staff to ensure they have the skills necessary to implement the new practices. Organization drivers include systems interventions,

facilitative administration, and decision-support data systems, which create an environment conducive to implementation. Leadership drivers involve technical and adaptive leadership to guide the organization through the change process (Table 1).

This paper uses the NIRN framework to discuss implementation of the WIDA ELD Standards, 2020 edition. When applied, the components and principles of implementation science account for the limitations that accompany typical adult learning: a push and a pull between individual learning and collective sense-making (Westerlund, 2014).

Implementation is a process, not an event. The process is marked by implementation stages that have been identified in practice. To use innovations and Active Implementation in practice takes time and effort. Exploration, Installation, Initial Implementation, and Full Implementation Stages guide organization and system investments in innovations supported by implementation best practices.

-Active Implementation Research Networks, Implementation Stages

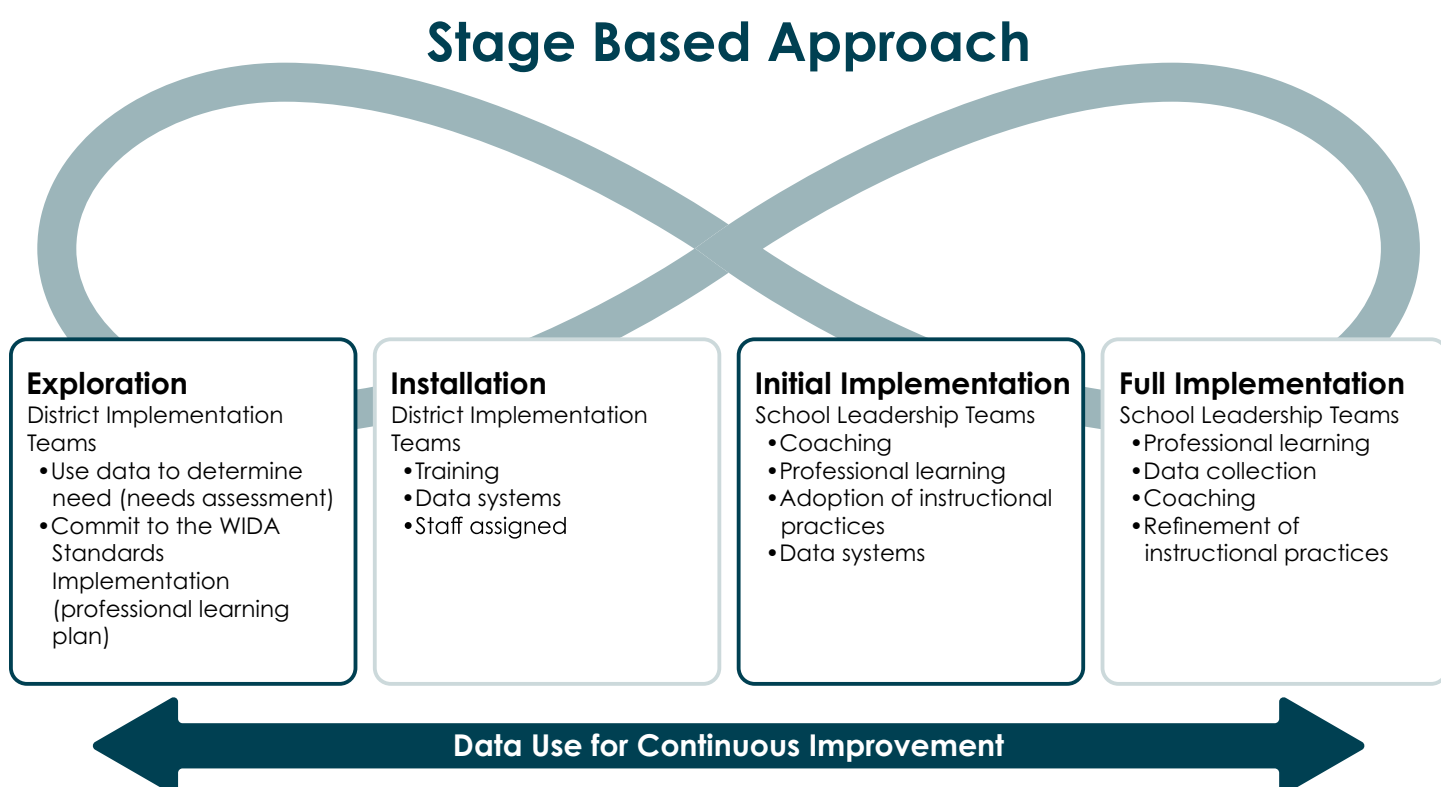
This process requires people to persist through the awkward stage when new learning is creating cognitive dissonance, often causing people to quit before realizing the full benefits of the new learning. This paper is organized around the stages of implementation (Figure 2) describing the work that was done so far in the Exploration and Initial Implementation stages.

Table 1. Implementation Components and the Guiding Questions to be Considered by the Implementation Teams

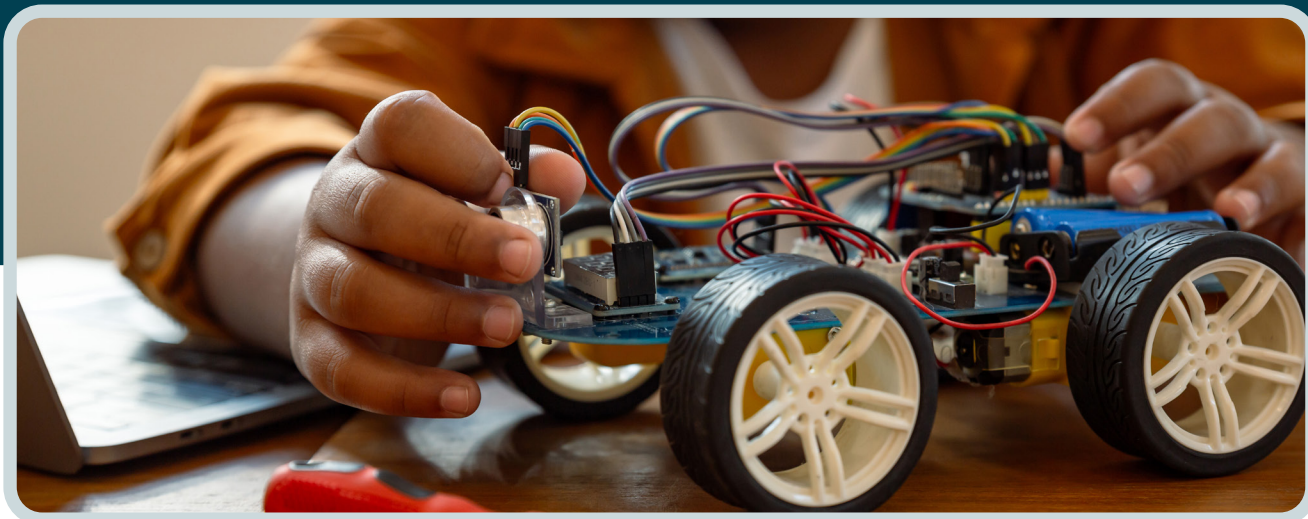
Implementation Component	Questions the Component Tackles
<p>Implementation Drivers: <i>“The engines of change” (Fixsen et al., 2005)</i> Read More</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will the work be supported through ongoing job-embedded professional learning (e.g., training, coaching, and collaboration) (Competency Driver)? • What data will be collected to inform the implementation of the WIDA ELD Standards (Data Cycles)? • How will we create the hospitable environment for the effective use of innovation by the teachers (Leadership Driver)? • How will the barriers be removed to make the implementation possible? (Organizational Driver) • How will leaders understand and support both the technical and adaptive challenges related to change (Leadership Driver)?
<p>Implementation Stage: <i>Dedicated distributed work over time to resist the pull of the status quo.</i> Read More</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will we create readiness for change and develop buy-in within the organization (including those that are intended to benefit from the change)? • Why is understanding and engaging in stage-based work critical to implementation success? • How will the work be distributed over time? • What work will be done and when? • How can we ensure that we are not trying to do too much in year 1? • How will we sustain the work when the status quo is challenged?

Implementation Component	Questions the Component Tackles
Implementation Cycles: <i>Plan-do-study-act cycles</i> Read More	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will we know if what we are doing is working? • How will we gather and “act on the information to tailor practitioner behavior, adapt organizational routines, and adjust system practices”? • How are we addressing contextual problems as they arise? • What adjustments do we need to make to ensure our processes are working for our people?
Implementation Teams: <i>The teams of people at different levels and functions to make the work happen.</i> Read More	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will be doing the work? • Who is accountable for making it happen”? • Who will help “balance urgency and the pace of change”?

Figure 2. *Stages of Implementation* ([Based on Active Implementation Research Networks](#))



Exploration



The exploration stage involves understanding the data and selecting appropriate evidence-based programs and practices based on identified needs. During this stage, teams work to build readiness for change within the organization and map out the broad implementation process.

To build readiness for change, significant work was first done with Riverbend School District EL teachers to develop a foundational understanding of the purpose of the ELD standards and how essential they are for guiding instruction in general education classrooms, not just for ML students but for all students. Additionally, EL administration, curriculum leaders/administrators, and Instructional Support Teachers were brought into the work, with a primary focus on building awareness and basic understanding of the ELD standards, and addressing the common concern of “Why me?” among participants who already have demanding roles.

Riverbend school district organized two on-campus, in-person 3-hour CESA 2 workshops, one in May 2023 and another in August 2023, tailored for EL administrators, curriculum leaders/administrators, and Instructional Support Teachers (ISTs) as well as EL teachers. During these sessions, they learned about the pedagogy behind the ELD Standards, emphasizing how it aligns with the district’s non-negotiable commitment to equity, ensuring that learning is designed for all learners from the outset rather than being adapted later.

Implementation Teams

Implementation teams are the people who oversee the work. They are the stakeholders who are invested and responsible for ensuring the change is sustained and goes beyond receiving professional development, but supports the entire process. At Riverbend, the implementation team for 7th, 8th and 9th grade mathematics consisted of the EL Program Coordinator, the Director of Curriculum and Assessment, and a team of secondary-level EL teachers with extensive mathematics co-teaching and co-planning experience.

Expertise is required to purposefully, effectively, and efficiently support using innovations as intended to produce desired outcomes reliably and repeatedly. This expertise is developed in Implementation Teams that are formed by reassigning and repurposing current staff in organizations and systems.

-Active Implementation Research Networks, Implementation Teams

While the secondary-level mathematics teachers participation on the Implementation Team would have increased levels of expertise, they were not involved in the initial ELD standards summer work for unrelated reasons. However, the EL teachers who participated possessed extensive co-teaching experience in 7th, 8th, and 9th grade mainstream math courses, which provided them with a thorough understanding of the math curriculum and instruction.

Teams of ELD Professional Development to Implement the WIDA ELD Standards Framework in Riverbend

Group 1: EL Teachers

The initial communication with EL teachers and then with district leadership was to build a general understanding of the link between content standards and language standards, and to begin to see how essential the language standards are for guiding instruction in mainstream classrooms, first for the EL, but also for any student. The EL teachers recognized the necessity of becoming English Language Development Standards content area experts as their district transitioned towards mandatory adoption. To build confidence, we organized two full-day workshops at an off-campus location. The goal was to empower them as the go-to ELD Standards experts.

Group 2: EL Administrators, Curriculum Leaders, and Instructional Support Teachers

Our primary focus was on building awareness, understanding, and addressing the common concern of “Why me?” among participants who already have demanding roles. To tackle this, we organized two on-campus in-person 3-hour CESA 2 workshops, one in May 2023 and another in August 2023, tailored for EL admin, curriculum leaders/admin, and ISTs, and included Group 1 EL teachers. During these sessions, they learned about the pedagogy behind the ELD Standards, emphasizing how it aligns with our district’s non-negotiable commitment to equity.

Group 3: School Board, Administrators, Principals, Classroom Teachers, and Interventionists

The Director of Curriculum and Assessment and the EL Program Coordinator led an ELD Standards Presentation to the School Board in Spring 2023. Following this, the School Board formally adopted the ELD Standards in Summer 2023. In Fall 2023, during the annual EL presentation to the School Board, the EL Program Coordinator and Assistant Superintendent of Instruction provided more information on the standards and shared the progress the district has taken in integrating them into the curriculum. Concurrently, EL Programming

and ELD Standards overview presentations were conducted by site EL teachers at their respective schools, fostering awareness within the broader educational community.

School Department Level: Biweekly School Department Meetings

EL K-5 Teachers: Choose 2-3 grade levels to focus on building awareness, understanding and practice around ELD standards and strategies for language learning. So, for example, it is likely that elementary will focus on literacy, so EL K-5 teachers would focus on building awareness and understanding around social and ELA ELD standards during grade-level collaborations.

EL Middle School Teachers: Choose social studies, math or ELA to focus on building awareness, understanding and practices around ELD standards and strategies for language learning during the school department meeting collaborations.

EL High School Teachers: Choose social studies, math, ELA, or science to focus on building awareness, understanding and practices around ELD standards and strategies for language learning during department meeting collaborations.



Installation



The installation stage involves creating the infrastructure necessary to ensure the successful implementation of a program or practice. This includes clearly defining the program or practice, developing high-quality professional learning for implementers, defining what and how data will be used (including implementation data and impact data), selecting and training first implementers, and ensuring adequate resourcing.

Installation: Clearly Defined Practice

To successfully implement a program or practice, the WHAT of implementation needs to be clearly defined. At Riverbend, the first practice was defined as the integration of the Language Expectations, Language Functions and Features into the district's mathematics curricular frameworks for grades 6-8. Starting with the district curricular frameworks provides teachers with a common reference document, common language, and a common approach to implementation of standards down the road. This helps the team with the implementation approach to be strategic and planful by creating a system infrastructure to ensure sustainability and consistency across classrooms and program models.

Installation: Professional Learning and Teacher Resources

As part of the overall professional learning plan, it was determined that the EL teachers would be the “go-to” ELD standards experts. Initially, they unanimously experienced feelings of anxiety and uncertainty due to the magnitude of the task, but they recognized the necessity of becoming ELD standards experts. To alleviate these feelings and ensure their success in their new role, EL teachers were provided professional learning in the form of two one-day workshops.

Following discussions with the Director of Curriculum and curriculum coordinators, the EL teachers agreed that the district's math curriculum frameworks were the most comprehensive and well developed to use in collaborative planning in the coming years. It was determined that 9th grade Algebra would be the starting point for the work. Their objective was to infuse ELD Standards into the existing math frameworks, establishing the groundwork for content-based language instruction strategies that align with the specified content standards.

Figure 3. Year 2. A Scope & Sequence of Professional Development Offered by CESA 2 in 2023-24.

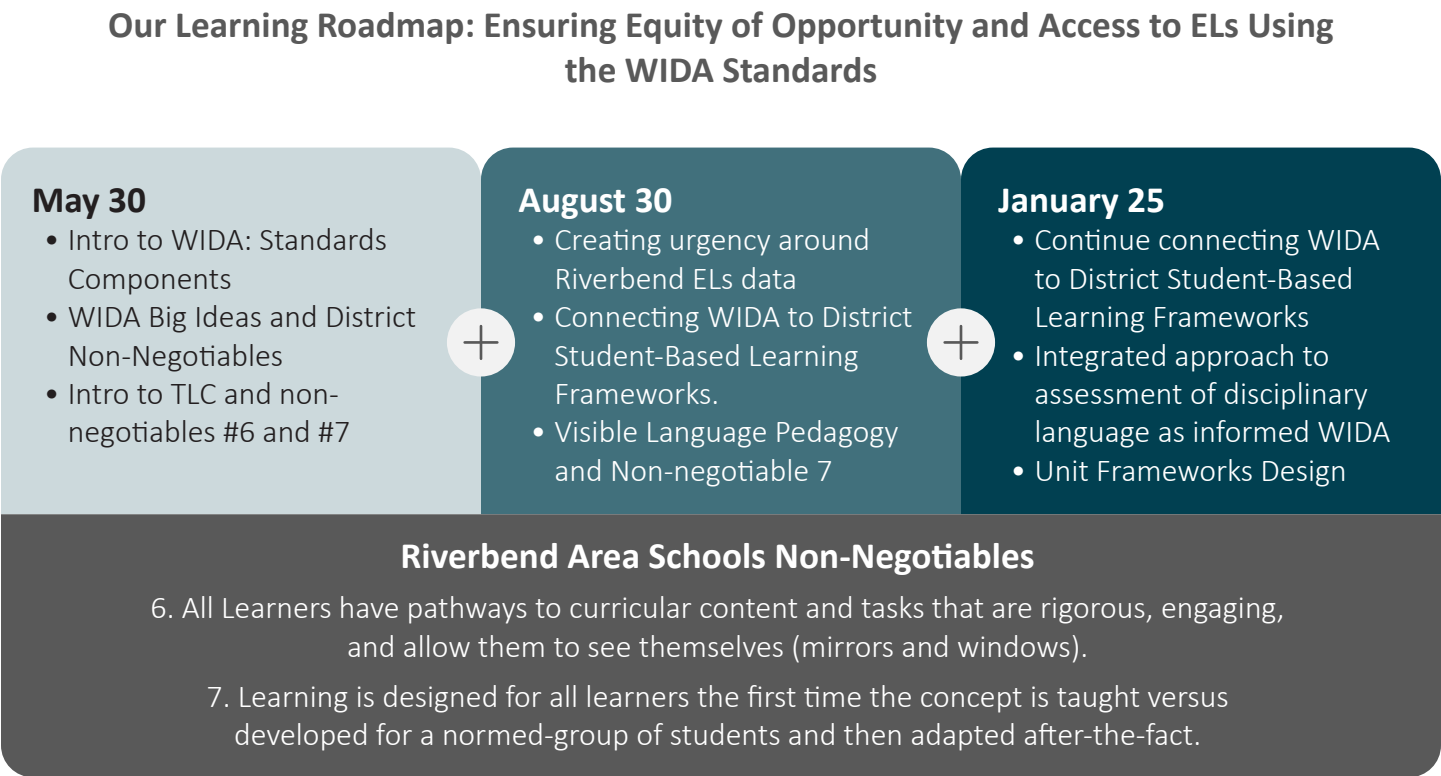


Table 2. *Professional Development Offered by CESA 2 in 2022-23, and 2023-24*

Year 1. PD for EL Teachers in 2021-22
Introduction to WIDA 2020 ELD Standards Framework. Understanding purposes of ELD Standards (uses and misuses). Understanding Key Language Uses and Functional Approach to Language Development through disciplinary texts.
Year 2. PD for EL Teachers in 2022-23
Review the Mathematical Principles for the CCSS from Stanford’s Understanding Language. Recognize the shift that the new WIDA ELD Standards require for language development in the content areas, specifically for math. Identify how to make the language of math made visible at the discourse, sentence and word level in a unit of study and recognize the opportunity to use the language of math as language resources (tools) for students within a lesson or unit Identify next steps for integrating the ELD Standard of Math into instruction.
Year 2. PD for Instructional Coaches, Curriculum Directors, and Assistant Superintendents of Curriculum and Instruction in 2023-24
May 2023 Session Outcomes: Understand the Big Ideas and the Key Instructional Shifts as facilitated by the 2020 edition and identify ways they connect with the Riverbend Area School District’s equity goals. Understand the WIDA 2020 ELD Standards Architecture through the main components: Language Expectations, Key Language Uses, Language Functions and Features and how they can be used in Instruction. Examine how the pedagogy of apprenticeship, the Teaching and Learning Cycle can be used to improve teacher practice to address language in the service of learning. August 2023 Session Focus Areas: Creating urgency around Riverbend Area School District MLs’ data Connecting WIDA to District Student-Based Learning Frameworks. Visible Language Pedagogy and District Non-negotiables. January 2024 Session Focus Areas: Understand arguments (Key Language Use Argue) as defined by each discipline. Determine instructional opportunities for intentionally developing oracy as scaffolding of rigorous learning. Identify the corresponding ELD Standards for Argue in ELA, Science, Social Studies, and Language Arts to build cross-departmental consistency of understanding of what disciplinary argumentation means.

Initial Implementation

The initial implementation stage of the WIDA ELD Standards using an implementation science approach involves strategically planning the process (the “How?”) and preparing an implementation team (the “Who?”) who will oversee the work and ensure sustainability of efforts past the professional development. Implementation drivers such as competency, organization, and leadership are crucial, as they ensure educators have the skills, resources, and support needed for effective integration of the standards. Continuous monitoring and feedback mechanisms help identify and address challenges early, fostering a culture of continuous improvement. By focusing on these core elements, schools can effectively embed the WIDA ELD Standards into their instructional practices, promoting equitable learning outcomes for multilingual students. The Riverbend Area School District has only begun this stage and will continue the work in the 2024-25 school year. Below is their process of integrating the WIDA ELD Standards into the math curricular frameworks (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Riverbend Area School District's Process for Embedding ELD Standards into Standards-Based Learning Frameworks

Process for Embedding ELD Standards into Standards-Based Learning Frameworks

Read & review the curriculum essential standards for the content addressed in the unit.

Look at the chapter test (take notes on key vocabulary, potential ELD language expectations & language functions/features that align) (referring to WIDA ELD framework book (start at page 185 & 192))

Identify 1-2 interpretive and/or expressive ELD Language Expectations

Review and discuss notes to focus on ELD language expectations (interpretive and/or language functions/features which align with content curriculum essential standards.

Complete the Framework reference document with recommendations

Look at the model responses or mentor text and include it in the math curricular framework.

Discuss in PLCs: How can we teach this in a very visible way?

Next Steps For ELD + Math Curricular Frameworks

Research & review Wisconsin Math Standards and Wisconsin Standards for Math Comparison to dive deeper to correlate ELD standard recommendations.

Pilot the Standards Based Learning Framework with ELD Standards Recommendations with established algebra co-teachers (as seen fit)

Add examples of how we can apply ELD Language Functions & Features in the classroom

Supports & Strategies

Content-specific examples

Connect with algebra co-teachers to educate on ELD standards and alignment to algebra curriculum.

Collaborate and gain perspectives from algebra co-teachers on aligned standards and adapt Standards Based Learning Framework with ELD Standards Recommendations document. (make changes if necessary)

Next Steps For ELD + Math Curricular Frameworks

Continue to deepen the understanding and application of ELD Standards for EL teachers.

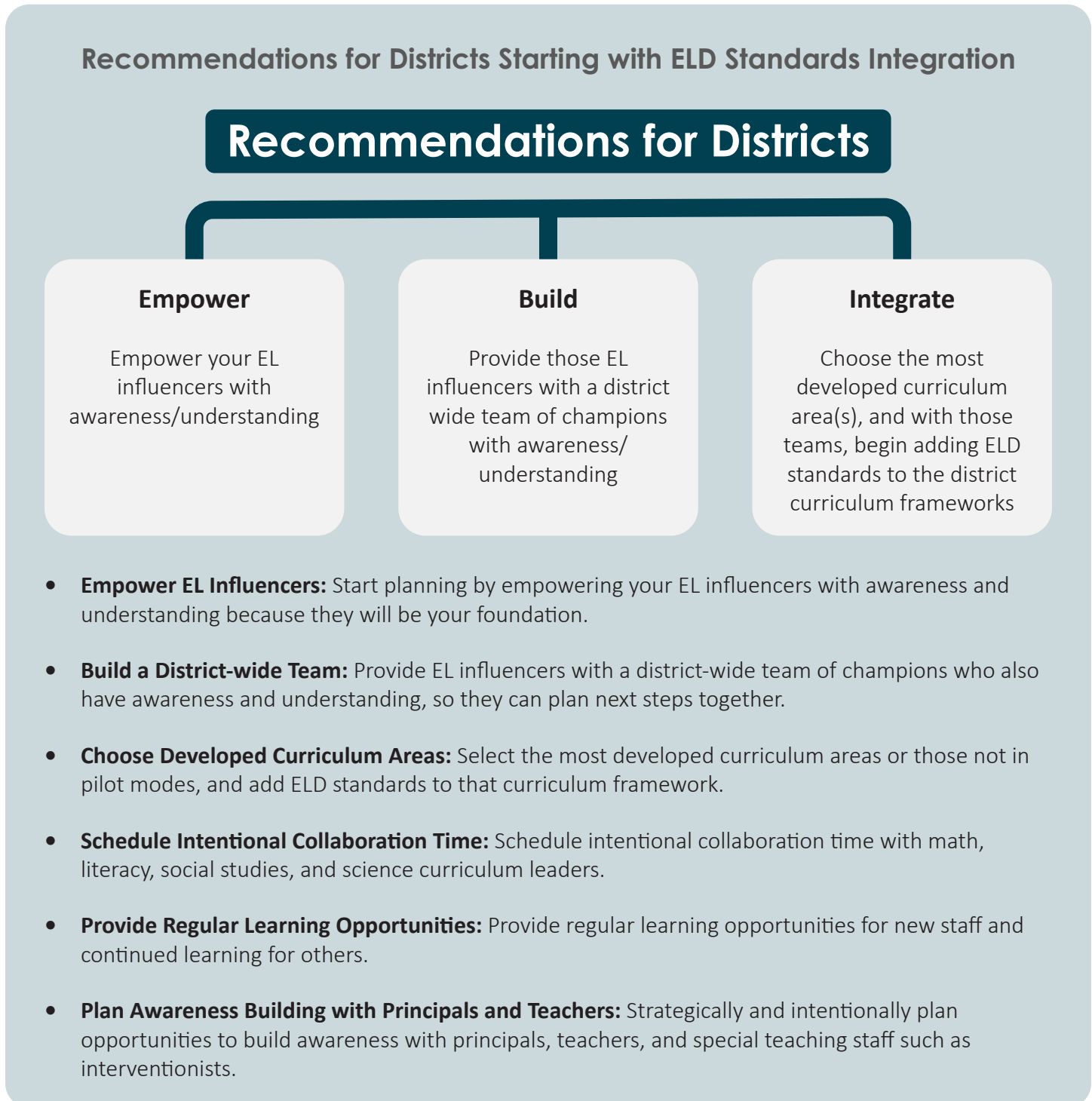
Schedule intentional collaboration time for EL leaders and math, literacy, social studies and science curriculum leaders.

Provide continued learning opportunities for new Group 1 (EL teachers) and Group 2 (EL admin, curriculum leaders, instructional support teachers).

Provide continued learning opportunities for Group 2 staff if needed outside of collaboration time with EL teachers.

For 24-25, strategically and intentionally plan opportunities to build awareness for Group 3 staff (Principals, teachers, interventionists).

Figure 5. *Recommendations for Districts Starting with WIDA ELD Standards Implementation*



Challenges and Opportunities

The Riverbend Area School District faced several challenges while integrating ELD standards. These challenges, which need ongoing attention, primarily fell into two categories: lack of time and difficulty securing and maintaining stakeholder buy-in.

Firstly, consistent administrative involvement was challenging due to several factors. The ELD Standards were often seen as the sole responsibility of the EL team, and their potential as a resource for improving outcomes for MLs was not fully recognized. This resulted in limited participation and support from administrative teams. Additionally, curriculum directors and coordinators struggled to engage beyond attending professional learning sessions.

Secondly, garnering support and enthusiasm from classroom teachers proved difficult. The Implementation Teams also faced issues with time allocation, specifically for integrating standards into instructional units, facilitating collaborative planning among teachers, and creating opportunities and resources for collaborative reflection among educators.

Discussion

The implementation of educational standards is often mistakenly reduced to a series of professional development sessions, under the assumption that training teachers once or twice will suffice to transform their educational practices. However, PD-focused implementation without a comprehensive, system-wide infrastructure typically results in fragmented efforts. Without ongoing support, initial enthusiasm may dissipate, and the status quo may reassert itself, leading to incomplete and unsustained changes. As highlighted by the Active Implementation Systemic Change framework, “when effective innovations and effective implementation are introduced into the system, they disturb the status quo and disrupt existing ways of work. When the status quo is disturbed, ‘local change typically has to fight significant organizational inertia and seldom survives continual attacks from the organization at large.’” Additionally, “legacy systems

represent a layered history of well-intentioned but fragmented change efforts” (Active Implementation Systemic Change).

These observations underscore the complexity and difficulty of implementing educational initiatives without coordinated, system-level support to sustain the efforts of instructional coaches, curriculum directors, and teachers. Historically, educational initiatives have been plagued by cycles of starting new programs, encountering resistance, pausing, and then attempting new initiatives, leading to what is often termed “initiative burnout”. Implementation Science offers a framework to break this cycle by treating implementation as a process rather than an event, thereby providing a structured approach to planning and executing change over time. This method allows for adult learning to be contextualized and tested in classroom settings.

Key to this process are the Implementation Drivers—coaching, organization, and leadership—which are essential for translating knowledge into practice. Often neglected, these drivers facilitate the sustainability of change by ensuring that the efforts are supported at all organizational levels and persist through the challenging phases when the status quo is disrupted. A systematic approach, grounded in Implementation Science, ensures that stakeholders are prepared to counteract the pull of the status quo with clearly defined practices supported throughout the entire process. Crucial to this approach is the data gathered from all implementation activities, including professional development.

Next Steps

To advance their current efforts, the district needs to define teacher practice in terms of observable, teachable, and learnable instructional practices, in alignment with the principles of Implementation Science. Table 3 shows an excerpt of what the instructional practices aligned with the ELD Standards may look like. Implementation science emphasizes the importance of clearly defining and measuring specific teacher instructional practices to ensure effective practice and fidelity to interventions (Fixsen et al., 2005). By operationalizing teacher behaviors related to ELD Standards, districts can create a shared understanding and consistent approach to language instruction.

Table 3. *Example to Illustrate Instructional Practices Associated with the ELD Standards for Collaboration Among Stakeholders.*

Instructional Practices for Collaboration Among Stakeholders Around the WIDA ELD Standards	
1. Teachers collaborate at all steps of instruction: co-planning, co-teaching, co-assessing, and co-reflecting and have shared ownership of students.	a. Teachers co-plan and co-teach around student data and both sets of standards (ELD and academic content standards) to address language learning goals aligned with the Key Language Uses and Language Expectations and disciplinary practices.
	b. Teachers co-assess by reviewing student classroom data using Proficiency Level Descriptors and together design instruction to accelerate student learning as informed by the language data.
	c. Teachers review student data (including classroom assessments) together and co-reflect together on how students are progressing toward meeting the Language Expectations in the ELD Standards Framework and disciplinary practices from the academic content standards.
2. Co-design instruction around the components in the ELD Standards Framework.	d. Teachers identify high leverage Key Language Uses in the unit of instruction (e.g., Explain and Argue in science) and discuss how they connect with the academic content standards and their summative assessments.
	e. Teachers select relevant Language Expectations as informed by those Key Language Uses (e.g., construct scientific explanations that describe observations and/or data about a phenomenon p. 122 in the WIDA ELD Standards Framework, 2020 Edition) at the unit level.
	f. Teachers use Language Functions and Language Features to hone in on language in the service of learning at the lesson level (e.g., develop reasoning to show relationships between evidence and claims through connectors that combine ideas, p. 123)
3. EL teachers are positioned as language experts, not simply to support the content area teacher, but to make sure students receive the language instruction they deserve by law.	g. Teachers clarify the roles and focus of instruction when designing co-taught lessons ensuring that language needs are addressed (not another dose of content or another dose of literacy interventions but as disciplinary language experts).
	h. Teachers use intentional co-teaching structures to build on the strengths of both teachers and continue to refine roles and structures to maximize the benefits of collaborative models.

A critical next step is to deepen teachers' understanding of the ELD standards and their instructional potential. Sustained, job-embedded professional development is needed to contribute to changes in teaching practices and improved student outcomes (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). This entails not only initial training but also ongoing PD that is integrated into teachers' daily practice through cycles of continuous observation, coaching, and support.

Additionally, intentional collaboration time with curriculum leaders is necessary to facilitate the integration of ELD standards into all subject areas. Professional learning communities (PLCs) provide a structure for teachers to share practices, analyze student data, and refine instructional strategies, thereby building collective capacity for effective implementation of ELD standards (Stoll et al., 2006).

Ensuring regular learning opportunities for all relevant staff—including teachers, administrators, support staff, and other stakeholders involved in EL education—is also essential. Comprehensive implementation requires attention to leadership, organizational supports, and continuous improvement processes across multiple levels of the educational system (Fixsen et al., 2009).

By following these steps, the district can create a more inclusive and equitable educational environment, ensuring that all students benefit from the integration of ELD standards into the curriculum. Implementation Science provides a framework for scaling up effective practices and sustaining change over time. Ongoing support, training, and data-driven decision-making are essential components of successful implementation.

Other Recommended Resources by CESA 2 on Implementing the WIDA ELD Standards:

- [Teaching with the WIDA ELD Standards in a Literacy Block](#)
- [Scaffolding Multilingual Learners' Access to Wisconsin Social Studies Inquiry through the WIDA Standards](#)

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the key principles of implementation science that guided the Riverbend Area School District in adopting the WIDA ELD Standards, and how did these principles help in overcoming initial challenges?
2. Discuss the importance of professional development in the successful implementation of the WIDA ELD Standards at Riverbend. How were EL teachers and general education teachers prepared to support this systemic shift? How can coaching support professional development and shifts in instructional practice?
3. The authors say that a typical approach to implementation is to offer professional development and expect the teachers to be ready to implement the standards. How is this approach to implementation similar or not to your district's approach? What else is needed to ensure PD leads to shifts in instructional practice and sustainability of change?
4. In what ways does the integration of the WIDA ELD Standards into mainstream education promote educational equity for MLs, and what specific disciplinary practices are emphasized to achieve this?
5. Reflect on the role of collaboration among educators, families, and communities in fostering an inclusive learning environment for MLs. How did the Riverbend Area School District leverage these relationships to support the holistic development of multilingual learners?

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