CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS IN THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

DR. MARIA MONTALVO-BALBED, EdD
DR. BERNADETTE MUSETTI, PhD
March 15, 2013

In this paper the authors highlight both challenges and opportunities for teachers and English Language Learners in meeting the Common Core State Standards, explain key instructional shifts required by the standards and the implications of those shifts, and recommend areas for professional learning related to effective instruction of English Language Learners in the Common Core era.
Introduction

The Common Core State Standards, developed under the sponsorship of the National Governors Association and Council of Chief State School Officers, were designed to raise the skill and achievement levels of students in U.S. schools in an effort to have the nation’s students graduate from high school “college and career ready” and to have the U.S. remain as competitive as possible in an increasingly flat and globalized world. In this paper, we focus primarily on the language-demand implications of the Common Core Standards and specifically on the challenges and opportunities afforded by the adoption and teaching of these standards for English Language Learners (ELLs). These standards require students to, among other things, comprehend complex texts, understand a speaker’s point of view, build on others’ ideas and articulate their own ideas, make evidence-based arguments from a variety of sources and texts types, and use language persuasively. These new standards in English Language Arts/Literacy are distinguished by several key shifts, requiring students to:

Understand Complex Texts: Students read a wider range of texts, both fiction and nonfiction, with an increased focus on informational and expository texts, where there is a “staircase” progression of complexity of texts over time.

Analyze, Infer, and Give Evidence: Students analyze, comprehend, and make concrete arguments about the texts they are reading, using evidence from those texts.

Write from Sources: Students draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support their written analysis, reflection, and research.

Attain Mastery of Speaking and Writing: Students make arguments, orally and in writing, in preparation for and reflective of those they will be required to make in college and in their careers.

Understand and Develop Academic Vocabulary: Students understand and utilize academic vocabulary and language to access texts across all disciplines. (CCSSO, 2010; NYSED, 2012).

Current Context

It has been argued that the CCSS are not a panacea for the problems facing the American education system, which is characterized by economic inequity and large numbers of students coming from poverty (Darder, 2012). Rather, the CCSS are the latest attempt at meaningful reform within a larger educational context characterized by a system of standards, assessment, and accountability and coming after more than a decade of federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, which allowed states to set their own achievement targets and resulted in the lowering of standards in some cases. At their best, the CCSS create opportunities to maximize the potential and promise of American youth and, collectively, the country, through increased access to high-quality teaching and learning. This in turn can help to narrow the achievement gap that has persisted for decades in the U.S., where the gap continues to widen for the fastest-growing segment of the school-aged population—English Language Learners—those students acquiring English as an additional language. It is estimated that by the 2030s, a full forty percent of all school-aged children will be ELLs (Thomas & Collier, 2002), thus making a focus on their achievement of the Common Core standards an issue of national importance.

Severe budget deficits at the federal and state levels have resulted in the reduction or elimination of many courses at the college level, primarily the community college level, designed to remediate students in literacy and numeracy and get students ready for college and careers. The CCSS are designed to allow and require students to gain these skills in high school and be ready for college upon high school graduation. At the same time, current and former English Language Learners may increase in numbers within post-secondary institutions, due to expected immigration reform efforts and legislation.

It is estimated that by the 2030s, forty percent of all school-aged children and youth will be English Language Learners.
One of the biggest challenges posed by those working to implement the CCSS is how to teach in ways that allow all students to succeed in meeting the standards, including students who speak a primary language other than English. In this paper we acknowledge the complexity of addressing this issue, but propose that the most effective approach is one in which ELL students’ knowledge and use of the primary language is leveraged to promote high levels of learning and biliteracy, as described further in this document.

English Language Learners: A Diverse Group

Meeting the goals and realizing the promise of the CCSS is only possible if we understand the diversity inherent in our schools and the ways in which cultural and linguistic differences can be understood as capital students possess and which can be leveraged as assets. Nowhere is this truer than when it comes to English Language Learners. This group of students numbers approximately five million K-12 students who represent hundreds of primary languages, but where the vast majority (approximately 80%) are native Spanish speakers. ELLs are the fastest-growing population of students in the public school system in the U.S. and they are not a monolithic group. They are linguistically, geographically, and culturally diverse, as are their schooling experiences prior to entering U.S. school systems (August & Shanahan, 2006; Understand Language Group, 2012). Some ELLs come to the U.S. with high levels of native language literacy and strong foundational skills, which normally transfer to new schooling and language contexts, whereas others—for example, students with interrupted formal education (SIFE)—have a different educational trajectory. ELLs in the U.S. include large numbers of immigrant students, but even larger numbers of native-born students, all of whose bilingualism can and should be a springboard to developing high levels of academic language and content area achievement, if properly nurtured and developed.

Not only are ELLs growing at a rate several times of all other groups, they are also the lowest-performing subgroup nationally. This creates a national crisis to which we must respond. In this paper, we put forth the argument that while we acknowledge that ELLs may have greater hurdles and certainly must have an accelerated learning curve, the reality is that they will have a competitive advantage over their monolingual classmates in the future if their primary language is maintained and used to promote English language development and academic success. As a nation, we should allow students to capitalize on the cognitive, social, and economic benefits of bilingualism, which is an increasingly important requirement of college and career readiness in our 21st century global economy.

Historical Context

With the 2001 reauthorization of ESEA, referred to as “No Child Left Behind”, the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs became the Office of English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement for Limited English Proficient Students. The focus shifted away from bilingual education and toward the acquisition of English, as reflected in the language of Title III—Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students. At the same time the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education was changed to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language instruction Educational Programs, reflecting the federal stance toward English as the language of instruction (Wright, 2010).

When viewed from the angle of standards, assessment, and accountability structures, it could be argued that as a nation we have made significant strides toward the equitable and effective education of English Language Learners over the past several decades and as the numbers of ELLs have grown exponentially. Still, the efficacy of these efforts in terms of ELL student achievement outcomes has been less than what was hoped for and certainly less than what is needed. Over the past fifty years we have gone from having few or no language standards for English Language Learners, to having state and national efforts, including the multistate World Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) consortium’s standards for ELLs and national Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) standards for ELLs. Individual states have also designed and adopted their own English Language Development (or ESL, ESOL) standards.
At the time of this writing (March, 2013), a majority of states (46), the District of Columbia, four territories (Guam, American Samoa Islands, US Virgin Islands, Mariana Islands) and the Department of Defense Education Activity have adopted the CCSS and many are in the process of rewriting or otherwise aligning their own state standards to the CCSS.

Alignment of English Language Proficiency Standards to the Common Core

A consortium of organizations\(^1\) coordinated by the Council of Chief State School Officers has issued the Framework for English Language Proficiency Development Standards Corresponding to the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) for the purpose of offering guidance to states and ELL stakeholders on the development of English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards around the language practices that ELLs must acquire in order to successfully master the CCSS. “The Framework supports the development of state ELP standards that are responsive to students’ linguistic, academic and developmental levels” (CCSSO, p. 1). The Framework does not define a set of actual ELP standards, nor is it prescriptive in terms of how ELLs should be taught, but rather, it communicates the language practices embedded within the CCSS for language arts, mathematics, and science and provides a “descriptively rich structure for unpacking the language demands of the CCSS and NGSS.” By showing how to unpack the expectations of the CCSS standards, the Framework illustrates the language expectations found in the disciplines (p. 2–3). It also provides a protocol for determining the degree of alignment present between the Framework (which outlines the language demands of the CCSS) and current ELP standards or those in development. “The goal of the Framework is to ensure that states utilize well-crafted ELP standards so that the developing needs of ELLs are met and all ELLs receive the rigorous and systematic education they need to graduate from high school as college and career ready” (p. 2). State English Language Proficiency standards should help teachers scaffold instruction to support students as they engage in sophisticated and cognitively demanding disciplinary practices and develop conceptual, academic, and linguistic skills, regardless of students’ levels of English language proficiency. While state ELP standards should support the academic rigor demanded by the CCSS and NGSS and have clear and explicit criteria for measuring varying levels of English language proficiency, they should also allow for the uneven growth and development ELLs undergo and not expect native-like performance. (p. 6).

Despite the design and adoption of high quality, rigorous standards that promote high levels of multiple literacies across a variety of text types, depth of understanding, critical thinking, and other “twenty-first century skills,” it is the professional development, teaching, and implementation of these standards across a wide range of students, including those who are in the process of learning English, that will determine the educational value of the standards. The CCSS offer little guidance on how educators should approach the standards with respect to ELLs, except to emphasize that all students should be held to the same high expectations while recognizing that ELLs may require additional time, appropriate instructional support, and aligned assessments. Effectively educating ELLs will require meeting each student’s needs through “adjusting instruction and closely monitoring his or her progress” (CCSSO, 2012, p. 4).

Academic Achievement of English Language Learners

The academic achievement and schooling outcomes for English Language Learners vary greatly. However, taken as a subgroup of the K-12 population, English Language Learners have very low achievement outcomes, high dropout rates, low college attendance rates, and even lower college graduation rates (USDOE, 2012). "On the 2011 National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) twelfth-grade reading exam, 77 percent of twelfth-grade English learners performed below basic in reading compared with 27 percent of their non-ELL peers. Only 3 percent

---

\(^1\) Consortium partners include Wisconsin Center for Education at UW-Madison, University of Virginia, New York University, TESOL, Stanford University, and WestEd.
of twelfth-grade ELLs scored at or above the proficient level in reading. The struggle continues for ELLs in other subjects, as evidenced by 2009 NAEP science assessment, where 88 percent of twelfth-grade ELLs scored below basic; only 1 percent performed at or above the proficient level” (Haynes, 2012, p. 3). ELLs also have lower levels of academic achievement than other students with similar socioeconomic levels, indicating that there is a language gap that contributes significantly to an overall gain in achievement (Migdol, 2011). The underachievement of ELLs can be understood at least in part by factoring in that in addition to often having some of the least qualified teachers, ELLs, the majority of whom are students of color and come from families living in poverty, are concentrated in highly segregated, underfunded schools (de Cohen, Deterding & Clewell, 2005; Randolph-McCree & Pristoo, 2005).

Long Term English Learners

As a group, English Language Learners continue on a trajectory of underachievement in U.S. schools. Many second- and third-generation adolescent learners who are educated exclusively in the United States continue to struggle with the use of language and literacy in secondary-level academic coursework (Haynes, 2012). There is a new subgroup of ELLs defined as Long Term English Learners (LTELs). These students are unlike ELLs recently arrived in the country as they have spent most or all of their lives in the United States (Olsen, 2012). California is the first state in the nation to pass legislation requiring districts to report how long English Language Learners have been designated as such, following research findings that show large numbers of students are failed by their schools and remain ELLs for more than six years, thus making them Long Term English Learners.

In the recent report on Long Term English Learners, Olsen, (2012) outlines a series of clearly articulated pathways to improve the educational outcomes for this group of students. One of the proposed solutions is to establish high-quality programs of primary language development. According to the same report, “these courses should be designed for native speakers, and include explicit literacy instruction aligned to the literacy standards in English and designed for skill transfer across languages” (Olsen, 2012, p. 35). An important aspect of the imperative to do better when it comes to the education of English Language Learners includes preventing students from becoming LTELs.

Key Principles for Effective Instruction of English Language Learners

Teachers must understand key principles for effective instruction of ELLs, if these students are to be academically successful with meeting the Common Core State Standards. A set of these key principles for English Learner instruction within the CCSS has been identified and summarized by the Understanding Language Group (2012) at Stanford University. These principles include instruction that:

• Leverages ELLs’ native language and culture;
• Develops discipline-specific language along with discipline-specific knowledge;
• Is standards-aligned and grade level appropriate;
• Addresses the needs of students with various levels of English proficiency with a variety of prior schooling experiences;
• Provides the necessary support to ensure that ELLs comprehend disciplinary texts and tasks;
• Is driven by diagnostic and formative assessments used to identify students’ knowledge and academic language competencies to guide instructional practice.

Importantly, the CCSS not only address content, but also learning strategies and cognitive processes students need to understand, make meaning, retain, and apply content. Conley (2011) writes “The ideal result of the standards implementation will be to move classroom teaching away from a focus on worksheets, drill-and-memorization activities, and elaborate test-coaching programs, and toward an engaging, challenging curriculum that supports content acquisition through a range of instructional modes and techniques, including many that develop student cognitive strategies, including problem formulation, research skills, interpretation of data, communication of ideas and findings in the form of constructing an argument or other approach, and exercising precision and accuracy throughout” (p. 17).
This is particularly good news for ELLs, for whom an unenriched curriculum can be particularly de-skilling and can have serious consequences (Ruiz & Figueroa, 1996). The most effective means of promoting English language development is through meaningful content instruction facilitated by skilled teachers. The promise of the CCSS is that teachers will teach to the standards and assess these in ways that are valid, enriching, empowering, and produce the kinds of outcomes intended through their design.

**Recommendations**

**Getting “On Board” and “Up to Speed”**

States and school districts are at different stages in their adoption and alignment of the Common Core Standards. The first task for many is to have educators understand the standards and what they mean at a given grade or content class for teachers and students. States and districts also vary greatly in the degree and depth of preparation of teachers in terms of educating ELLs. In some states, the effective teaching of English Language Learners and students with special needs is embedded into virtually all teacher preparation programs, whereas in other states, there is no such requirement and teachers can opt to “add on” such endorsements. Regardless of the level of preparation of teachers to effectively teach ELLs, which, as a nation is very low (Spring, 2012; Wright, 2010), districts must offer intensive and sustained high-quality professional learning for their teachers and administrators if the standards are to be understood, taught, meaningfully assessed, and met by all students, especially English Language Learners. Likewise, teacher preparation programs in adoption states must embed the state-aligned standards into their programs, which indeed many have done and are doing. At the state level, we recommend establishing a mechanism through which key stakeholders along the college and career preparation continuum (K-12 through all segments of post-secondary education), are convened in order to promote, coordinate, streamline, and assess efforts throughout the pipeline, as is already happening in several states.

**All Teachers Are Language Teachers**

All teachers must understand that if all students are to learn content and meet the CCSS, that content must be accessible to them, which means making appropriate adjustments and designing instruction that increases comprehension for students (through linking to students’ background information, understanding language demands of the tasks in any lesson, “unpacking” dense language and highlighting key vocabulary, allowing and encouraging students to use their primary language and to collaborate, engaging students in meaningful “instructional conversations,” giving useful feedback, etcetera). The CCSS literacy shifts require that teachers instruct in ways that allow students to use language as the vehicle to listen discerningly, and to read, speak, and write coherently and critically about subject matter. The implications of these requirements for student performance are high, as they should be, but they are also high for teachers, especially for teachers who have never thought about the complexity of the language of their subject. Teachers are expected to create instructional environments that both challenge and support students to learn subject matter. In addition, teachers must also teach students how to connect this knowledge to the larger world and to applications beyond the classroom. This will require all teachers to examine the language of the lessons and of the disciplines in which they teach in new ways.

**Instructional Practice and Professional Learning**

Skillfully implemented, the CCSS will promote teaching in ways that increase efficacy and accelerate language development and overall academic achievement for ELLs. Teachers must know how to instructionally assist students to access and create a variety of complex texts of various types, use high order thinking and application of understandings, while increasing rigor, creativity, critical thinking, and promoting literacies of many kinds, including informational and technological literacy. Skillfully implemented, Common Core Standards will expedite a narrowing of the achievement gap between ELL and non-ELL students. However, educators require guidance on what they should know and do in order to skillfully implement the standards. Here we identify five key areas of educator professional learning that are critical to the success of English Language Learners in this era of new standards. Pre-service and in-service teachers should be offered high-quality learning opportunities in each of these areas,
as well as in other areas previously identified and noted above.

- Sociocultural Factors in Schooling Success for English Language Learners
- The Role of Primary Language in Schooling Success for English Language Learners
- Meaningful Content: Teaching and Assessment
- Language Awareness and Scaffolding That Promote Language Development
- Technology to Engage and Accelerate In- and Out-of-School Learning

Sociocultural Factors in Schooling Success for English Language Learners

In addition to the aforementioned instructional shifts required by the CCSS, Quezada and Alfaro (2013) suggest that another shift, an ideological shift, is called for on the part of teachers, whereby teachers develop and operate from an ability-centered, rather than a deficit perspective of English Language Learners. Quezada and Alfaro call on teachers to take an active interest in their ELL students, including learning about and valuing students’ cultures, languages, and families, and using these as strengths and leverage points for informing the curriculum. Indeed, if ELLs are to meet the standards, teachers must have high expectations, offer students pedagogical and academic excellence, show caring, and serve as advocates for them. Teachers and school staff also need to understand that parents of English Language Learners may have different ways to show they care about their children’s education, and those ways vary across cultures. A lack of typical forms of parental engagement with schooling does not necessarily mean ELL parents are failing to support their children’s education. In some cultures, for example, it is common to defer to the authority, expertise, and caring of the teacher, and trust that she or he is doing the right thing for their child. Additionally, parents of students from a wide array of backgrounds often find schools to be unwelcoming and culturally unresponsive (Allen, 2007; Valdés, 1996). Engaging families of immigrants and other English Language Learners in culturally appropriate ways, especially those who have been traditionally marginalized within our social, economic, political, and educational systems, will produce stronger links between students, schools, and families, and thus, better student outcomes. Indeed, the Common Core presents many opportunities for English Language Learners, including the opportunity to become part of more inclusive communities within the schools they attend (Bunch, Kibler, & Pimentel, 2012).

The Role of Primary Language in Schooling Success for English Language Learners

“State English Language Proficiency Standards should respect and build on the language and culture of ELLs by leveraging the primary language linguistic and cultural resources they bring to the classroom. For example, state ELP standards should explicitly consider how the transfer of literacy skills from students’ first language (L1) to the second language (L2) could best proceed by understanding how the discourse practices of the primary language could be utilized to facilitate learning” (CCSSO p. 4). The voices affirming culturally responsive education advocate for an education whereby students are respected and engaged in rigorous academic work with teachers who understand how language and culture impact students’ second language proficiency and in which students’ linguistic and other types of capital are recognized as such and leveraged (Montalvo-Baibed, 2011).

Students benefit from drawing on what they know in their primary language, regardless of the subject they are learning. However, science and social studies are excellent examples of subject areas where the vast majority of ELLs (e.g. those who speak a Latin-based language) and other ELLs can draw on cognates in their primary language to learn English and content, if indeed they know the words in their primary language. Additionally, many “academic” words in English have cognates that are “everyday” or conversational words in Spanish, and so students who speak Spanish have a vast repertoire of words found in English texts in their spoken language (Corson, 1995; 1997). For example, two common or everyday words in Spanish are explicar and edificio, which translate as to explain and building respectively. These have English cognates, which are explicate and edifice respectively—decidedly not everyday words in English. These are words students would be more likely to encounter in English texts, because in English these are academic, not conversational words. The important point is that students should be encouraged to draw on what they know in their primary language and use that as a springboard to
understanding and achieving in English, while learning disciplinary content (Musetti & Tolbert, 2010).

**Meaningful Content Teaching and Assessment**
Imagine what instruction for ELLs, and all students, would look like if the overarching goals of instruction, as those outlined in CCSS (emphasis added), were to have students:

- Undertake close and attentive reading
- Understand and **enjoy** complex works of literature
- Habitually perform selective and critical reading in print and digital texts
- Actively seek wide, deep, and thoughtful engagement with high-quality informational and literary texts that **build knowledge, enlarge experience, and broaden worldview**
- **Demonstrate reasoning** and use of evidence that is essential to private deliberation and **responsible citizenship** in a democracy
- Develop skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening that are the foundation for any **creative and purposeful expression** in language

This is a departure from much of what has counted as curriculum for English Language Learners over the past decade. Whereas NCLB resulted in many instances in a narrowing of the curriculum and instruction focused on teaching discrete bits of information reflective of the tests that drove such teaching, the CCSS require teaching and assessments that are more meaningful, performance-based, and applications of the knowledge and skills needed for college and career readiness. Implementation of the CCSS brings with it the potential to change how we teach and assess in ways that will benefit all students, including ELLs.

New standards require new types of assessment. The standards allow for assessments that reflect their requirement for complex connections, high order thinking, challenging, and non-routine applications of knowledge, including projects assessments, performance tasks, and computer simulations (Conley, 2011). We should not and must not wait until ELL students have acquired particular language structures to engage them in high order thinking and cognitively demanding tasks. Rather, we must allow for approximations (not expect native-like proficiency), provide instructional support for meaningful content learning, and use ongoing formative assessments to guide instructional decisions and to provide students with useful, timely, and continuous feedback.

**Language Awareness and Scaffolding That Promote Language Development**
It is well understood and acknowledged that learning and language development take place as social activity. Teachers can promote student growth and success by creating contexts in which there is a great deal of cognitively engaging student-teacher and student-student extended discourse, often referred to as ‘Instructional Conversation’ (Tharp & Gallimore, 1991). In a review of the research on what constitutes effective pedagogy for students whose first language is not English, Goldenberg (2008) reports that a strong scaffold for supporting ELLs in English-only settings is to provide opportunities for extended interactions with teacher and peers. Likewise, Téllez and Waxman (2006) describe the practice of ‘Instructional Conversation’ as a way of addressing the need for cognitively challenging curriculum, which moves teachers and students away from the typical pattern of teacher-directed instruction that currently characterizes most classroom interaction. In their research, they suggest that effective teachers of English Language Learners provide opportunities for extended dialogue as a way to bridge the achievement gap that continues to widen for the vast majority of students whose first language is not English.

Teachers should also become aware of the language demands and discourse elements inherent in lessons across all subjects taught. Discourse elements are described as the language features involved in communication and include “word level features (e.g., words and phrases), sentence level features (e.g., language forms and conventions) and supra-sentence level features (e.g., organization, text types, and genre) and are guided by the demands of the context (e.g., audience, register, task, or situation, roles, and identities)” (CCSSO, 2012, p. 5). A related and critically important aspect of teaching to these language demands is the need for teachers to develop deep knowledge of the vocabulary and language functions for the content areas they teach and then present ongoing opportunities in the classroom for students to use this vocabulary and these language functions (Haynes, 2012, p. 8).
Additionally, teachers should explicitly teach (meta)cognitive and other strategies for learning so that students become increasingly aware of their own learning and of strategies for building independence in learning. Teachers should develop, use, and teach a repertoire of text-based scaffolds and strategies that allow students to access, comprehend, and produce texts of many kinds. Teachers should guide students through how to do close reading and to ‘unpack’ academic language in order to understand it. Fillmore and Fillmore (2012) describe how classes analyze complex texts, even working at the sentence level, during and through which students construct meanings. For excellent exemplars of CCSS units designed across curricular content and scaffolded in ways that allow ELL students access to rigorous standards-based literacy practices, see Understanding Language http://ell.stanford.edu/.

Technology to Engage and Accelerate In- and Out-of-School Learning
In their book Literacy, Technology, & Diversity, Cummins, Brown, and Sayers (2007) describe ways in which diverse groups of students, including ELLs, used technology imaginatively to engage cognitively at high levels, to generate knowledge, to analyze issues, to articulate realities, and to achieve academically through expanded notions of what it means to be literate. They further state as the goal of the book to “sketch a pedagogical blueprint for implementing literacy instruction appropriate for an increasingly diverse information Age society” (p. vi). Readers are shown a range of vignettes and case studies in which teachers of low income, linguistically diverse students build on students’ social and cultural capital while “expanding students’ intelligence, imagination and multilingual talents, using technological tools as powerful amplifiers” (p. v). This work offers encouraging examples of the ways in which technology can and should be used to improve student outcomes, while engaging students at the highest levels across multiple literacies (e.g. quantitative, critical, cultural, technological). Technology can be used to promote equity in education and can serve as a means to provide increased access to content for ELLs and other students, while allowing for learning differences and differentiation in the ways that students can demonstrate learning and express what they know (Haynes, 2012).

The Common Core allows and requires teachers to focus more on depth and less on breadth of curriculum. Still, teachers of ELLs must accelerate learning to the greatest extent possible. Technology can be used to maximize in-school learning through, for example, using a “flipped” pedagogy in which students do some of the foundational and background learning for the lesson using technology, often prior to attending class. Teachers are using a range of technologies to teach and to communicate about learning with students, including social media, educational and other software, gaming, and various educational “apps.” In the CCSS era, the use of technology is one of the ways students can be offered additional resources for in- and out-of-school learning to promote overall language development, including oral language, reading and vocabulary development, and writing skills. Effectively utilizing technology can maximize learning for ELLs in ways that are engaging and accelerate their language development and content area learning.

Summary
Within the CCSS there is a focus on informational texts and expository/informational writing, which is appropriate, given that we are in an informational age where we can no longer teach students a particular “canon” of information at the rate information and knowledge are multiplying. We cannot even fully imagine what issues or crises our students will have to address or what problems they will have to solve in coming decades, where out of necessity everyone will be a lifelong learner and most will have many different jobs over a lifetime. Within the CCSS, students must learn to learn and become independent learners equipped with a full range of metacognitive strategies, aware of what they understand and know, as well as when they do not understand, and have strategies to help themselves learn in order to be successful with any given task and across disciplines. The time is now for a new model of teaching, learning, and assessing.

At the national level, two large consortia, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers Consortium (PARCC) and Smarter Balanced, have been awarded U.S. Department of Education “Race to the Top” funding to develop
new assessments linked to the new standards. Data from these systems will be used for instrumental purposes such as allowing for easier benchmarking of U.S. student achievement at an international level and providing additional information regarding the degree to which students are college and career ready, as defined by the standards and assessments. However, the promise of the standards will, in large part, be realized as a result of the quality of the assessments designed, if we acknowledge that to some degree, assessment will continue to drive instruction, as it has so intensively throughout the NCLB era.

The current context is one in which a confluence of factors makes possible the highest levels of achievement for ELLs and an opportunity to work diligently and collaboratively to begin to close the achievement gap between English Language Learners and non-English Language Learners. As noted previously, it has been estimated that within approximately twenty years, ELLs will constitute approximately forty percent of the school-age population in the U.S., thus making their academic achievement a national priority, as they are in very real terms, the future of the nation. We recommend in the strongest terms that educators, policymakers, and other key stakeholders work together with a shared commitment to and sense of responsibility for the academic success of this group of students, if they are to achieve at high levels and realize the promise of the CCSS—to be college and career ready in a multilingual, multicultural world.

References


continued


Appendix