The Framework for English as a Second Language Program Specialist PK-12 Guidelines

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COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Introduction to ESL Program Specialist PK-12 Guidelines

The English as a Second Language (ESL) Program Specialist PK-12 Program Guidelines are developed pursuant to Title 22 of the State Board of Education's regulations (22 Pa. Code § 49.62a) and follow the General Standards required for all certificates for State Approval of Professional Educator Programs. Section 49.62a states:

> § 49.62a. Program Specialist Certificate.
>
> (a) The Department may issue a Program Specialist Certificate upon verification that the applicant meets the requirements established for that certificate.
>
> (b) Program Specialist Certificates may be issued for a selected area of service when a certificate does not exist for that area. The certificates may be issued only to a person who holds a valid Pennsylvania certificate or its equivalent from another state. Annually, the department will report to the board the number and nature of these certificates issued during the year.
>
> (c) Program Specialist Certificates are valid only for the position described in the approved position description and will be annotated on the teaching certificate of the individual. They will be valid throughout this Commonwealth.

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide a clear focus on the required competencies and skills that ESL Program Specialists must have to teach the discipline of English as a Second Language with the provision that students will attain English language proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and writing, as well as to achieve academic standards that all children are required to achieve.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education's (department) vision provides for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of education, which includes the provision of culturally responsive and equitable educational programs for English language learners (ELs), and assurance of their participation in all aspects of the educational system. Furthermore, the department views ESL students and their parents as cultural and linguistic assets to the Commonwealth's global initiatives. The department is committed to using its Standards Aligned System to ensure that English language learners receive core curriculum instruction and achieve high levels of academic success. Moreover, the department's goal is to ensure that its programs address the needs and rights of English language learners in its initiatives throughout the process of planning and implementation.

This document describes the professional knowledge, skills, and competencies that candidates will learn by completing a prescribed sequence of courses (including field placements). In addition to specific requirements and competencies, these guidelines discuss the ESL Program Specialist PK-12 program design and any prerequisite

certificates needed by the candidate. Educator preparation programs (EPPs) should also consult and incorporate these existing guidelines:

- Common Ground Framework Guidelines;
- Structured Literacy (SL) Program Framework Guidelines; and
- Professional Ethics (PE) Program Framework Guidelines.

Candidates graduating from an EPP with their first Instructional I certificate **before** August 31, 2026, are required to complete the competencies in Common Ground, Structured Literacy, and Professional Ethics.

Candidates graduating from an EPP with their first Instructional I certificate **after** August 31, 2026, are not required to complete competencies in Common Ground, Structured Literacy, and Professional Ethics, as these competencies would have been included in their Instructional I coursework. However, if a candidate did not complete an Instructional area that required structured literacy, then the candidate must receive preparation in and meet the Structured Literacy competencies.

Program Design and Delivery

Federal and state mandates, as well as current enrollment trends in Pennsylvania, require that the instructional demands of the EL population are carefully examined, including whether authorized institutions of higher education and intermediate units providing ESL Program Specialist programs are developing the most essential competencies to address the linguistic, sociocultural, and academic needs of this growing population. Educational programs for ELs must comply with federal and state mandates, including Title III, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), 20 U.S.C. §§ 6801–7014 (Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students), and state regulations. 22 Pa. Code § 4.26 requires every school district to provide a program for each student whose dominant language is not English for the purpose of facilitating the student's achievement of English proficiency and the academic standards under 22 Pa. Code § 4.12 (relating to academic standards). Programs include bilingual-bicultural or ESL instruction.

As the number of ELs in Pennsylvania increases, so must the level of expertise of all educators who work with them. Well-informed, prepared and highly competent ESL Program Specialists are required to bridge the complex cultural, linguistic, instructional, and social barriers faced by ELs, and their parents in schools and the community.

In Pennsylvania, a certified ESL teacher has received specialized education in second language development and its implications for instruction and assessment of linguistically and culturally diverse English learners.

An ESL Program Specialist is able to demonstrate through practice the following skills and attributes:

- In the area of language, the ESL Program Specialist demonstrates a deep understanding of the English language's structures, functions, forms, and

the patterns and conventions of written and spoken language.

- In ESL instruction, the ESL Program Specialist demonstrates proficiency in the implementation of research-based methodologies to teach ESL, as well as the design of effective differentiated instruction which applies to the WIDA English Language Development Standards (2020).
- In assessment implementation, the ESL Program Specialist demonstrates competence in the implementation of state-mandated English language proficiency assessments (WIDA Screener/WIDA MODEL and *ACCESS*), as well as knowledge in the use of data to inform instruction.
- In literacy development, the ESL Program Specialist applies effective instructional practices needed to provide a rich, comprehensible language environment with supported opportunities for the development of literacy in English.
- In the area of program implementation, the ESL Program Specialist demonstrates knowledge of the legal underpinnings of 22 Pa. Code § 4.26 and the department's Educating English Learners ELs Basic Education Circular, and applies this knowledge to plan, implement, and advocate for effective ESL programs.
- In the development of an effective, culturally responsive learning environment, the ESL Program Specialist collaborates with other educators addressing the affective, linguistic, and cognitive needs of ELs at varying levels of English proficiency.
- The ESL Program Specialist is competent in the use of resources that facilitate effective communication with parents from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Completion of an Instructional I certificate area is required to receive certification as an ESL Program Specialist PK-12. Candidates in Instructional I certification programs may simultaneously take the ESL certification coursework. However, candidates must pass their certification requirements and receive their Instructional I certificate before applying for their ESL certification.

ESL Program Specialists in Pennsylvania are expected to assist ELs to achieve school success. To meet these expectations, the successful ESL Program Specialist program must educate candidates to demonstrate an ability to integrate knowledge of the complex social, psychological, and nature of learning a second language (L2) in their planning and teaching; to set high but reasonable expectations for individual students, varying instructional objectives and strategies, and monitoring student success; and to vary their teaching style to accommodate students' different learning styles.

The number of credits in an ESL Program Specialist program may not exceed 18. PDE recommends a program of between 15-18 credits, which includes required field experiences. The program design must describe clearly how the relevant set of knowledge, skills, and competencies inform the program design, and the application must also indicate how the institution will assess whether candidates have acquired the required knowledge, skills, and competencies. While some online courses may be a component of the program, programs are expected to include face-to-face components.

Field experiences always must be face-to-face.

Candidate Competencies

The ESL Program Specialist certificate is issued to eligible individuals that have demonstrated competency related to the following key domains:

I. Language

The domain of language serves as a foundation for understanding not only the structure and usage of the English language but also the processes in which first and second languages are acquired. Through a solid knowledge base of applied linguistics, ESL teachers will be able to identify linguistic challenges for students of diverse native language backgrounds and determine the most effective instructional strategies for teaching. An in-depth understanding of the English language will also provide candidates with a pragmatic and sociolinguistic perspective that helps them to understand relationships among language, culture, accent, identity, and public perceptions of language learning.

Candidates will demonstrate ability to:

A. Recognize language as an integrative system made up of component parts (phonology, morphology, syntax, pragmatics and semantics) and apply this knowledge to identify aspects of English that are difficult for Els;
B. Support ELs in communicating effectively for social and academic purposes by enhancing oral/aural skills (i.e., recognizing and using syntactic structures, the English sound system, and other communication skills);
C. Support ELs in understanding and using appropriate register variation and language use within different contexts and for different audiences, including formal, informal, social, and academic;
D. Develop a variety of instructional techniques to assist ELs in developing and using vocabulary (e.g., idioms, cognates, collocations) and L2 literacy appropriately in written and spoken language, including contextualized practice with focused feedback;
E. Apply knowledge of the principles of first and second language acquisition, and of the differences between first and second language acquisition, to the design of instruction for Els; and
F. Apply strategies that recognize the role of students' first language as a resource for language and literacy development and for communicating with invested participants (i.e., students, families, volunteer support, and bilingual aides).

II. Culture

Successful candidates view culture as a dynamic and multilayered system of symbolic resources that impact individuals' identity, values, and behaviors in

varying degrees. Candidates should also be prepared to address the deep and often invisible dimensions of culture (i.e., world views, power, privilege) and their impact on student achievement (as defined by the department's Standards Aligned System), participation in the target language community, and patterns of interaction between home and school. Moreover, successful candidates view cultural identity or affiliation as an on-going process of negotiation within and among groups as well as within individuals.

Candidates must develop an awareness of how their own culture impacts their views of teaching, learning, and classroom expectations; explore the varied roles of teacher, parent, and student in terms of cultural and educational expectations; and understand that acculturation is not only a complex process, but a matter of individual choice.

Candidates will demonstrate ability to:

A. Demonstrate knowledge of the processes of negotiating one's cultural identity;
B. Differentiate between the varied processes of cultural transitions, including acculturation, assimilation, bi-culturation, and resistance.
C. Identify negative effects of prejudice, stereotyping and ethnocentrism on language learners' successful learning in schools and promote pro-social classroom learning environment;
D. Recognize cultural bias in curriculum and materials and use a range of resources to deliver instruction;
E. Demonstrate effective intercultural communication skills to appreciate diverse cultures;
F. Develop effective techniques for communication between home and school by recognizing and supporting the preferred mode of communication of the parent/guardian (i.e., written, oral, L1, L2, etc.) and utilizing interpretation and translation resources appropriately;
G. Demonstrate understanding of the interdependence of language and culture to facilitate students' transition between the home culture/language and U.S. school culture/language; and
H. Integrate diverse ways of learning and multiple cultural perspectives, including building on ELs' strengths, into the planning/adapting of curriculum and instructional methods.

III. Observing, Planning, Implementing, and Managing Instruction

Successful candidates are expected to demonstrate knowledge of their ELs and the role of individual characteristics in the process and outcome of language learning. Drawing upon this knowledge, candidates demonstrate an ability to observe and plan standards-based ESL and content instruction for students from Kindergarten through Grade 12. Successful candidates will use performance-based measures to assess ELs discrete and integrated ability to

use grammar, vocabulary, listening, speaking, reading, and writing to communicate.

Candidates will demonstrate ability to:

A. Design standards-aligned instruction in English utilizing the Pennsylvania Academic Standards, the English Language Proficiency Standards, and Can-Do descriptors in relation to the continuum of proficiency levels.
B. Plan effective lessons in all domains (Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening) using a variety of materials, texts, activities, strategies and assessments appropriately based on consideration of learners' differing English language proficiency, L1 literacy and prior knowledge, age and developmental stages, grade levels, learning styles and socio-cultural needs;
C. Plan ESL instruction and assessment specific to the reading and writing needs of students with limited or interrupted formal education.
D. Recognize, plan and implement key elements of ESL lesson design, which include:
    1. Content and language objectives;
    2. Scaffolding, supports;
    3. Activating and building on prior knowledge;
    4. Formative and authentic assessments; and
    5. Academic and social interaction at the English language proficiency level of the student, specifically in the domains of listening, speaking, reading and writing;
E. Differentiate instruction based on formative assessment of student progress, reteaching as necessary for students who need additional time and alternative approaches to meet learning outcomes;
F. Develop and implement communicative activities in PK-12 classrooms that promote authentic interactions for social and academic purposes and that integrate all language skills, i.e., reading, writing, speaking, and listening;
G. Plan and provide evidence-based reading and writing instruction that includes various cueing systems (i.e., graphic, syntactic, and semantic cues) appropriate for ELs;
H. Select, analyze and adapt a variety of authentic sources and tools to enhance oracy and literacy development for ELs, including but not limited to:
    1. Various popular texts, including fiction, non-fiction, comic-book style, etc.;
    2. Visual and/or original source materials;
    3. L1 materials;
    4. Music; and
    5. Media and multi-media, including technological resources and electronic communication.
I. Explain and model explicit comprehension and learning strategies

that assist students with learning tasks in all subject areas; and.

J. Collaborate with and provide guidance to content teachers of ELs related to using English language proficiency standards, appropriate supports, and adaptations which provide students access to content instruction, tasks and assessments at their English language proficiency level.

IV. Assessment

An effective instructor of English language learners will need to know, demonstrate and share knowledge and techniques of appropriate assessment with a range of stakeholders. This will include the ability to implement required testing as well as to make accommodations to such testing where appropriate; the expertise to help colleagues and families understand how assessment can be designed and interpreted to best demonstrate what ELs know and can do; the use of data generated by multiple measures of assessment to ensure that ELs have access to a quality language instructional program; and to make forward progress toward benchmarks in language and academic proficiency while enrolled in an school's program.

Candidates will demonstrate ability to:

A. Use multiple and appropriate formative and summative assessment measures for a variety of purposes, including classroom and student self-assessment and technology-based assessment (e.g., audio, video, computer) at various grade levels.

B. Apply appropriate testing practices for English language learners including:
   1. Determination of the validity and reliability of tests to make assessment related decisions for ELs;
   2. Knowledge and application of alternate and multiple assessment measures to ascertain what ELs' know and can do;
   3. Appropriate interpretation and use of data to support ELs; and
   4. Assessment of ELs' test-taking challenges and creation of strategies and scaffolding techniques to address these challenges.

C. Recognize, apply and share state-allowed testing accommodations for ELs at varying proficiency levels.

D. Identify and use multiple assessment resources and measures (including research, native language evaluation, Pennsylvania English Language Proficiency Standards, PA Academic Achievement Standards, and WIDA ACCESS performance rubrics, among others) to make informed decisions concerning an EL's progression through a language instruction program (identification, placement, progress, achievement, reclassification, and monitoring) observing all applicable national and state requirements.

E. Implement a variety of assessment tools as part of classroom instruction

(i.e., observation checklists, reading logs, video spreadsheet software, self- and peer-assessment, etc.), plan for classroom practice of each technique, and record progress towards an EL's English language proficiency and academic achievement.

F. Inform parents/families of federal and state-mandated testing and the implications of such testing for ELs in a language instructional program, using a family's preferred mode(s) of communication.
G. Identify accountability measures and assessment targets to analyze real-time EL data to make programmatic and instructional adjustments.
H. As part of an instructional planning team, analyze data from various EL groups (i.e., disaggregated, where appropriate, by language proficiency level, grade level, instructional site, etc.) to evaluate the effectiveness of an ESL program or language teaching methodology.
I. Identify and use a variety of resources and research, including native-language assessment and accommodated assessments, to inform decisions about language differences, giftedness, learning disabilities, and other qualities that would entitle ELs to participate in school programs.
J. Understand and share multiple measures of assessment data, collected over time, to document EL growth and progress before considering a referral to a special education or other remedial program; and
K. Evaluate and share data, including strengths and weaknesses of each model, with parents/family and other members of a team making informed decisions on referral of an EL for special education or gifted services.

V. Professionalism

Professionalism is regarded as a key domain for second language teacher educators. ESL teachers come from such diverse academic and cultural backgrounds and teaching experiences that they need to cultivate a common professional identity. Not only do ESL teachers need to establish themselves as highly qualified experts in their field, they must also serve as sources of knowledge about current language policy. To advocate for the profession and their students, ESL teachers must be able to take full advantage of professional resources and relationships at local, regional, and national levels.

Candidates will demonstrate ability to:

A. Use research in the field of ESL to articulate a personal educational philosophy for instructing Els;
B. Conduct focused action research in the classroom following applicable procedures for protection of human research participants;
C. Create a personal professional development plan based on interests and reflection, taking advantage of opportunities to support those goals in professional associations and other academic organizations;
D. Collaborate with general and specialist school staff (e.g.,

multidisciplinary faculty teams) for the purpose of establishing instructional programs appropriate for ELs at a variety of English proficiency levels;

E. Recognize the need to advocate for ELs and their families including full access to school resources and inform colleagues in instructional teams.

F. Develop classroom activities that could involve families and provide ELs and their families with information, support, and assistance (e.g., advocate for the students and their families, help families participate in their school/community using bilingual paraprofessionals or interpreters, or engage with community members and policymakers with respect to issues affecting ELs); and

G. Model the use of culturally and linguistically responsive techniques and dispositions, so as to support the learning of other school professionals working with ELs.

Field Experiences

Effective field experiences provide candidates with increasing exposure to learning situations and school settings under the guidance of program faculty and trained mentors throughout the preparation program. ESL field experiences are embedded in the coursework of the ESL program. For these experiences, the EPP is advised of the following:

1. At least one experience must be in (or related to) a public-school setting.
2. The educator can complete the field experience of the ESL program within their classroom if the educator has ESL students within the classroom. If the educator does not have ESL students within their classroom, then the educator should observe an appropriately trained and ESL certified colleague (to serve as mentor) who has ELs within their classroom.
3. If the educator candidate does not have a classroom placement, then the EPP can identify/approve other experiences in which the educator can observe the strategies and/or practice the strategies relevant to the ESL certification.
4. Because the field experiences are embedded within the ESL program coursework, an EPP must have a mechanism for tracking the required number of hours of field experience for the ESL candidate. *The goal of field experience is observation/exploration. Therefore, ESL candidates are required to complete a total of 40 hours* of field experience within the overall ESL preparation program.
5. When incorporating field experiences within the coursework:
    a. EPPs should consult the performance criteria of the Educator Effectiveness Observation & Practive: Framework for Evaluation: Pre-Service Teacher EPPs shall focus on Domain 1 and Domain 3, because the ESL certificate is attained only after an educator has obtained an Instructional Level I or II certificate.
    b. Some competencies can only be accomplished through field experiences. For example: DOMAIN 3: Instruction/COMPONENT 3E: *Demonstrating*

Flexibility and Responsiveness – “The student teacher demonstrates adaptability to adjust and differentiate instruction for all PK-12 students and promotes learning through extensive instructional strategies and flexibility for student interests and teachable moments.”

c. When designing an ESL preparation program, the EPP shall develop and incorporate assessments of ESL field experiences that include a comprehensive means to assess Domains 1 and 3 (i.e., reflective log and mentor feedback if the educator is using their own classroom).