

Overview of Education Reform: National and State Initiatives

National Initiatives

With the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, there has been a growing national concern among educators regarding school reform. Preparing students to succeed in the global economy and to become successful citizens of this country is a key goal of the national education agenda. In 1997, the United States Department of Education issued the following seven priorities:

U.S. Department of Education: National Priorities

1. All students will read independently and well by the end of third grade.
2. All students will master challenging mathematics, including the foundations of algebra and geometry, by the end of eighth grade.
3. By 18 years of age, all students will be prepared for and able to afford college.
4. All states and schools will have challenging and clear standards of achievement and accountability for all children, and effective strategies for reaching those standards.
5. There will be a talented, dedicated, and well-prepared teacher in every classroom.
6. Every classroom will be connected to the Internet by the year 2000 and all students will be technologically literate.
7. Every school will be strong, safe, drug-free, and disciplined.

At the national level, developing challenging and clear standards of achievement and accountability, as stated in priority #4, has been supported by the **Goals 2000: Educate America Act** and the **Improving America's Schools Act (IASA)**. Goals 2000 encouraged each state to develop challenging academic standards for all students. Simultaneously, the Improving America's Schools Act, passed in 1995, stimulated sweeping, schoolwide improvement in low-income communities for one purpose: to propel every child toward high standards.

The movement toward the development of national standards was undertaken by professional and educational organizations. In 1996, the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) published the **Standards for the English Language Arts**. In this document, they identified 12 content standards describing what students should know and be able to do to acquire English language arts (ELA) skills. Two standards are related to linguistic

Key Concepts:

- ◆ Goals 2000
- ◆ Improving America's Schools Act
- ◆ State standards
- ◆ Content standards
- ◆ NYS assessments
- ◆ Regents' Strategy for Raising Standards
- ◆ Essential Elements of Effective Programs
- ◆ Twelve Action Steps

*The sum of human
wisdom is not contained
in any one language
and no single language is
capable of expressing
all forms of human
understanding.*

Ezra Pound

diversity and English language learners. Standard 9 states, *Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.* Standard 10 stipulates, *Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.*

Similarly, in 1997, the National Center on Education and the Economy and the Learning Research and Development Center of the University of Pittsburgh published the ***New Standards/Performance Standards***. Their document identifies performance standards or indices of quality that specify how adept or competent a student demonstration must be in four areas in grades K-12: ELA, mathematics, science, and applied learning.

In recognition of the need to articulate goals and standards for the burgeoning school population of English language learners (LEP/ELLs), the national professional association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) published the ***ESL Standards for Pre-K-12*** (1997) based on three overarching goals for language use. They are: 1) to use English to communicate in social settings; 2) to use English to achieve academically in all content areas; and 3) to use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways.

Table 3 presents a comparison of English language arts and ESL standards at the national and State levels.

Table 3 English Language Arts and ESL Standards: A Comparison Across National and State Levels

Title	Organization	No. of Standards	Application to LEP/ELLs
<i>Standards for the English Language Arts (1996)</i>	International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English	12	Respect for linguistic and cultural diversity Importance of using the first language in developing English language arts
<i>New Standards/Performance Standards (1997)</i>	National Center on Education and the Economy; Learning Research and Development Center of the University of Pittsburgh	7	Application to LEP/ELLs not specified
<i>ESL Standards for Pre-K-12 Students (1997)</i>	Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages	3	All standards apply to LEP/ELLs
<i>NYS Learning Standards for English Language Arts (1996)</i>	New York State Education Department	4	LEP/ELLs are expected to meet all standards

State Initiatives

At the State level, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) developed an ***Overall Strategy for Students in New York State***, which sets clear, high expectations and standards for all students. In New York State the standards movement was evidenced by the publication of standards in seven disciplines: English language arts

(ELA); mathematics, science, and technology (MST); social studies; the arts; languages other than English (LOTE); career development and occupational studies (CDOS); and health, physical education, and home economics. At the local level, all districts in New York State, including New York City, undertook the process of aligning their curriculum with the NYS standards.

The New York State English language arts standards were established as the language arts curriculum for all students, including English language learners. The **English Language Arts Resource Guide with Core Curriculum** (1998) is the basis of instruction in native language arts (NLA) and English as a second language (ESL), as well as in ELA. **The Teaching of Language Arts to Limited English Proficient/English Language Learners: A Resource Guide for All Teachers** serves as a companion document to the ELA resource guide, providing support and guidance for first and second language literacy development in limited English proficient/English language learners (LEP/ELLs).

The New York State Strategy for Raising Standards

The major, overarching goal of the Board of Regents' statewide educational reform movement is to create within each school an educational environment that engages all participants in meaningful learning, respects diversity, and provides opportunity for all children to achieve at the highest levels. It is vital to provide English language learners with an educational experience that enables them to become skilled in the English language while capitalizing on the strengths of their native language and heritage. There are three fundamental strategies that form the foundation for the New York State educational reform agenda, which is entitled **The Strategy for Raising Standards**.

As a result of the Board of Regents' *Strategy for Raising Standards*, higher standards and more rigorous assessments of student progress have been implemented. Content standards in seven core subject areas have been developed, approved, and disseminated.

These content standards are the foundation of New York State's assessment system. Regents examinations have been revised to align them closely with the content standards. The new forms of assessment are learner-centered, knowledge-based, and responsive to the constituencies they serve. The new examinations include multiple measures and performance elements applied to real-life or work situations. The new assessment system as a whole provides more accurate information on what students know and can do. Successful performance on all Regents examinations is the standard of achievement for all students.

New York State Assessments

Table 4 outlines the NYS assessment requirements in the four core areas, along with special provisions for limited English proficient/English language learners.

Limited English proficient/English language learners in bilingual education must acquire proficiency in English and reach the identical high content standards inherent in these seven interdisciplinary frameworks, as all students are expected to achieve. To do so, LEP/ELLs will need access to educational materials and resources in both English and their first language. Educators of LEP/ELLs must develop meaningful instructional strategies that provide them with opportunities to engage their own languages and heritages in the process of developing proficiency in the English language. Instruction must not rely solely upon the verbal medium, but must also include textbooks, trade books, movies, videos, software, and manipulatives that have the potential to powerfully reinforce the acquisition of reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills.

New York State Strategy for Raising Standards

STRATEGY 1

Setting clear and high expectations and standards for all students and developing an effective means of assessing student progress in meeting the standards.

STRATEGY 2

Building the local capacity of the schools/district to enable all students to meet standards.

STRATEGY 3

Making public the results of assessment of students' progress through school reports.

New York State CONTENT STANDARDS IN CORE SUBJECT AREAS

- ◆ English Language Arts
- ◆ Mathematics, Science and Technology
- ◆ Social Studies
- ◆ Languages Other than English
- ◆ The Arts
- ◆ Career Development and Occupational Studies
- ◆ Health, Physical Education, and Home Economics

Table 4 New York State Assessments in Core Subject Areas

Grade	Subject	Special Provisions for LEP/ELLs (as of 4/99)
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS ASSESSMENT		
4	English Language Arts <i>Elementary</i>	LEP/ELLs who score at or above the 30th percentile on an English reading test must take the New York State English language arts assessments in grades 4 and 8.
8	English Language Arts <i>Intermediate</i>	LEP/ELLs who score below the 30th percentile must meet specific English language performance standards required in CR Part 154.
11	Regents Comprehensive Examination in English	<i>All LEP/ELLs must pass the Regents Comprehensive Examination in English in order to receive a high school diploma.</i>
CONTENT-AREA ASSESSMENT		
4, 8	Mathematics	LEP/ELLs who score at or above the 30th percentile on an English reading test must take the NYS assessments. LEP/ELLs who score below the 30th percentile on an English reading test and in whose native language the test is provided in written translation must also take the NYS assessments in the native language or in English. Translated editions are available in <i>Chinese, Haitian Creole, Russian, and Spanish.</i>
4, 8	Science	LEP/ELLs who score below the 30th percentile and in whose language the test is <i>not</i> provided in written translation may be exempt from the assessments.
5, 8	Social Studies	LEP/ELLs who score below the 30th percentile and in whose language the test is <i>not</i> provided in written translation may be exempt from the assessments.
10	Mathematics A Sequence I Regents	All LEP/ELLs must take and pass the mathematics, science and both social studies Regents examinations in order to receive a high school diploma. LEP/ELLs who first enter school in the United States in grade 9 or later may take the examination in their native language.
10	Science Regents	Content-area Regents examinations required for graduation will be translated into the following languages:
10	Global Studies Regents	<i>Chinese; Haitian Creole; Korean; Russian and Spanish.</i>
11	U.S. History Regents	

NOTE: For ALL State assessments: Additional testing accommodations for LEP/ELLs include extended time, separate testing room, and/or small group administration.

For State English language arts assessments only: LEP/ELLs may use bilingual dictionaries; teachers may read listening passage three times.

For State content-area assessments only: LEP/ELLs are permitted to have word-for-word oral translations of low-incidence languages and/or use of bilingual dictionaries and bilingual glossaries, if these aids provide only word-for-word translations. In addition, LEP/ELLs may use both the English and the native language versions of the assessments simultaneously.

New York State Initiatives for Limited English Proficient/English Language Learners

The Board of Regents and the State Education Department have undertaken a series of initiatives to ensure that all limited English proficient/English language learners are provided with the necessary services to enable them to attain the New York State learning standards. Two closely related initiatives are: (1) research and identification of seven ***Essential Elements of Effective Programs for Limited English Proficient/English Language Learners;*** and (2) a policy statement entitled ***Twelve Action Steps to Assist Limited English Proficient/English Language Learners in Meeting the ELA Standards.*** (See Appendices B and C.)

Through the first initiative, the NYSED Office of Bilingual Education in coordination with various national and state organizations conducted a national and State search for effective program models for LEP/ELLs. In order to validate the essential elements, a panel of practitioners representing outstanding programs from states with the largest LEP/ELLs populations (California, Florida, Illinois, and New York) was convened. The panel confirmed by consensus the seven Essential Elements of Effective Programs for Limited English Proficient/English Language Learners.

The research and the panel’s findings indicate that the most effective models address the uniqueness of their given context. In so doing, they not only meet the special needs of their LEP/ELLs, but they also provide quality bilingual and ESL instruction that allows LEP/ELLs to meet the higher standards. Although the seven elements are discussed as separate entities, they clearly interrelate and overlap, providing a framework for what works best for schools that will take the risk to be innovative, creative, and flexible in order to help LEP/ELLs achieve the greatest success possible.

A strategic plan was developed for implementing ways to enable LEP/ELLs to reach the standards and complete the requirements for graduation. This plan, known as the ***Twelve Action Steps to Assist Limited English Proficient/English Language Learners in Meeting the ELA Standards***, was approved by the Board of Regents. Both the Regents’ ***Strategy for Raising Standards*** and the seven ***Essential Elements of Effective Programs*** guided the development of the ***Twelve Action Steps to Assist Limited English Proficient/English Language Learners in Meeting the ELA Standards***.

Table 5 New York State Initiatives for Limited English Proficient/English Language Learners

The Regents’ Strategy for Raising Standards	Essential Elements of Effective Programs for LEP/ELLs	Twelve Action Steps to Assist LEP/ELLs in Meeting the ELA Standards
<p>STRATEGY 1 Setting clear goals and high expectations and standards for all students and developing an effective means of assessing student progress in meeting the standards</p>	<p>1. High standards for LEP/ELLs</p> <p>2. Strong literacy development for LEP/ELLs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting clear goals and curriculum for LEP/ELLs • Intensive English language instruction • Increased time in English as a second language instruction
<p>STRATEGY 2 Building local capacity of the schools/districts to enable all students to meet standards</p>	<p>3. Qualified/well-trained educators of LEP/ELLs</p> <p>4. School/district leadership committed to educational excellence for LEP/ELLs</p> <p>5. Positive school climate for LEP/ELLs</p> <p>6. Parent/community involvement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development for educators of LEP/ELLs • Ensuring that teachers of LEP/ELLs are certified • Identification and dissemination of information on model programs for LEP/ELLs • Extended school day and year • <i>Project Jump Start</i> • Equity in technology and instruction resources • Strengthen communication with parents of LEP/ELLs
<p>STRATEGY 3 Making public the results of assessment of students’ progress through school reports</p>	<p>7. Assessment and accountability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen identification and assessment procedures/instruments, and local accountability • Collecting and reporting data

To help limited English proficient/English language learners reach the high levels embodied in the New York State ELA learning standards, educators must first utilize what research has shown about the implementation of innovative, effective, and comprehensive instructional practices. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the foundations of language development in an academic context in the native language and in English, along with the significant research findings on which these foundations are based.