



**Success Indicator IN12:** The school district provides principals and instructional leaders guidelines and training on observing and evaluating all teachers with English Language Learners (ELLs) in their classrooms. (5889)

**Overview:** In order to “create and sustain systems of support for classroom teachers to [enable them] to work effectively with EL students” (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014, p. 338), school and district leadership need a clear vision for and understanding of effective EL instruction (Theoharis & O’Toole, 2011). Most school principals, however, do not feel equipped with the skills to evaluate whether effective instructional practices for ELs are occurring in their classrooms (Baecher, Knoll, & Patti, 2013; Fenner, Kozik, & Cooper, 2015; Goe, Biggers, & Croft, 2012). Districts must provide training for principals, coaches, and other evaluators on quality instruction for ELs so that they are aware of what to look for when observing, evaluating and supporting these teachers (August, et al., 2012).

**Questions:** What are some characteristics of observation/evaluation practices that can enhance EL instruction? How can districts prepare principals and other instructional leaders to observe and evaluate the quality of EL instruction?

#### **What are some characteristics of observation/evaluation practices that can enhance EL instruction?**

General observation systems commonly used by districts, such as the Framework for Teaching (FFT) (Danielson, 2011) or the Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model (Marzano, 2011), do not account for specific instructional practices that may benefit ELs (Fenner, et al., 2015; Jones, Buzick, & Turkin, 2013). In fact, observation biases may occur when teachers have significant numbers of EL students in their classrooms, thus leading to lower ratings of effectiveness (Whitehurst, Chingos, & Lindquist, 2014). Fenner et al (2015) further warn that without teacher evaluation systems that are inclusive of effective EL instructional practice, teacher preparation programs will not have the incentive to prepare teachers to meet their needs. Teacher evaluation protocols “should reflect the rich variety of students that teachers encounter in classrooms throughout the country on a daily basis” (Fenner, et al., 2015).

Effective teachers can make instructional decisions depending on the characteristics of the ELs in their classroom, and observation tools should reflect teachers’ capacity to differentiate instruction based on students’ needs (Jones, et al., 2013). While districts may adopt an observation protocol specifically designed for classrooms with ELs (e.g., Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), Echevarria & Short, 2010), many districts may not have the capacity to support the use of multiple observation/evaluation systems (Jones, et al., 2013). Jones et al., (2013) suggest that districts consider supplementing or adapting an existing observation tool (e.g., FFT) to reflect instruction specific to ELs. One example of this practice comes from EL researchers who have conceptualized principles of effective instruction that are consistent with federal laws and describe an inclusive classroom for ELs (August, Salend, Fenner, & Kozik, 2012). Fenner, et al., (2015) subsequently developed a framework that reflects these principles and may extend and complement district’s use of existing observation/evaluation tools such as the FFT. The framework includes the following principles and suggestions for observing and/or evaluating teachers on each principle:

- 1. Committing to equal access for all learners:** Teachers must demonstrate their awareness of, and willingness to adhere to laws and court precedents related to full and equal access to learning for all students. In pre-observation conferences, teachers should be able to clearly describe students' needs and how they will adapt their instruction to ensure access for each EL student. Teachers should be able to articulate which strategies and resources will meet their EL's needs to the evaluator, and demonstrate their understanding of both content and English language proficiency standards, and curriculum and assessments for ELs. Observer/evaluators must also have this knowledge in order to recognize effective teaching of ELs.
- 2. Preparing to support diverse learners:** Teachers demonstrate both an understanding of individual students and the development and implementation of supportive classroom environments in both pre-observation and observation phases. Observers should look for students' support of one another, a language-rich and thought-provoking culturally relevant classroom, and an atmosphere of warmth and respect. Teachers should be able to discuss how their ELs' language proficiency and other background factors determine the instructional scaffolding needed to learn content, and should articulate high expectations for EL achievement.
- 3. Reflective teaching using evidence-based strategies:** Observation during instruction yields information on the degree to which teaching is individualized, student-centered, appropriately challenging, standards-based, and based on evidence of effective practice with ELs. Observers must look for differentiation based on EL's level of language proficiency and background, and evidence that the teacher recognizes the need for students to acquire academic language and content knowledge simultaneously. Effective teachers use appropriate scaffolds (e.g., visuals, graphic organizers, home-language materials), and incorporate EL's culture, questions, and interests into instruction.
- 4. Building a culture of collaboration and community:** The post-observation conference can address the degree to which teachers fulfill professional responsibilities to enhance their work with ELs. Observers can look for evidence that teachers develop themselves professionally to become advocates for their ELs; effectively communicate with EL families and

participate in family literacy events, maintain required records to document ELs' language growth, attend professional conferences, and work collaboratively with other teachers and paraprofessionals.

Observations/evaluations should also be aligned with recommended or required professional learning opportunities for improved teacher practice. In addition to training to administer the observation tools, administrators and other evaluators will likely need training in how to provide the kind of feedback that teachers need and deserve to improve their teaching (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; DeMonte, 2013).

### **How can districts prepare principals and other instructional leaders to observe and evaluate the quality of EL instruction?**

Districts must adopt a comprehensive, district-wide focus on collaboration and shared accountability for EL success, including assessing teacher effectiveness (August, et al., 2012). More comprehensive teacher evaluation rubrics specifically reference EL's needs, and "school districts that clearly articulate expectations for teachers...foster specific teaching practices and behaviors that lead to improved outcomes for [EL] students" (Samson & Collins, 2012, p. 15). Jerald (2012) outlines three broad areas for district action to ensure effective observation/evaluation systems:

- 1. Build Observers Capacity**  
Coaches, school administrators, and other evaluators need high-quality training (and periodic reinforcement of training) on how to identify high-quality instructional practice with ELs so that they know what to look for during observations/evaluations and can support teachers with aligned professional learning opportunities (August, et al., 2012).
- 2. Create Conducive Conditions**  
Districts must be mindful of the demands on principals of implementing evaluation/observation systems; however, systems that incorporate multiple principal observations can create excessive and crushing work demands on principals (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016). Middle and high school principals may also be ill equipped to enhance pedagogy through classroom observation in content areas for which they have little or no training (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Hiring instructional and content experts (with EL experience) to coach teachers can improve



teachers' practice through sustained observation and feedback cycles (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016).

### 3. Monitor and Ensure Quality

Districts may want to take steps to audit the observation system's accuracy and reliability. Practices include analyzing observation data to identify problems with accuracy, audit evidence collected from observers to ensure that it aligns with scores assigned, and conduct a "reliability audit" based on additional observations in a sample of classrooms.

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### Resources

For many practical tools for observing/evaluating ELs, see:

- Fenner, D. S. Kozik, P., & Cooper, A. (2015). *Evaluating ALL teachers of English learners and students with disabilities: Supporting great teaching*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.