

# The ENGAGE Model

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# 1

*An effective driver is a policy (and related strategies) that actually produces better results across the system. An effective driver is not something that sounds plausible; it is not something that can be justified by a cavalier (as distinct from a carefully considered) reference to research. Nor is it an urgent goal (such as moral purpose); rather, drivers that are effective generate a concerted and accelerating force for progress toward the goals of reform. An effective driver is one that achieves better measurable results with students.*

(Fullan, 2011a, p. 4)

**F**ullan sums up what many individual teachers already know; their isolated efforts on behalf of English learners (ELs) cannot result in significant increases in student achievement unless driven by policies and strategies that are collaboratively enacted across their school buildings and districts. When individual teachers collaborate with grade- and building-level colleagues, building/district teams, administrators, and staff by developing mutually supportive relationships and programs that address EL-specific needs, school districts can accelerate their progress in achieving improved measurable results for ELs.

In addition to meeting Fullan's insightful criteria, an effective driver for advancing the achievement of ELs must be rooted, in its essence, in deep understanding of ELs' past and present realities and their specific linguistic, academic, and sociocultural needs. This requires the development of educator knowledge of, and personal connections with, student backgrounds. Such expanded perceptions and relationships constitute the foundation for the empathy and motivation required to implement high-quality instruction and assessment for English learners.

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Demographic data reveal that ELs compose the fastest-growing school-aged population in the United States (Mather, 2009, p. 3). Consideration of academic achievement data for these students further reveals the urgent need for an effective driver that will sustain school- and/or district-wide teams and inform their decisions.

### OVERVIEW OF THE ENGAGE MODEL

The ENGAGE model represents an effective driver for reform efforts related to the effective instruction and assessment of K–12 English learners, as it

- builds upon a foundation of insights regarding the students served,
- is based upon carefully considered EL-specific research,
- is designed to create a “concerted and accelerating force for progress” on behalf of ELs, and
- will achieve better measurable results with students (Calderón, Slavin, & Sánchez, 2011; EdSource, 2007; Goldenberg, 2008).

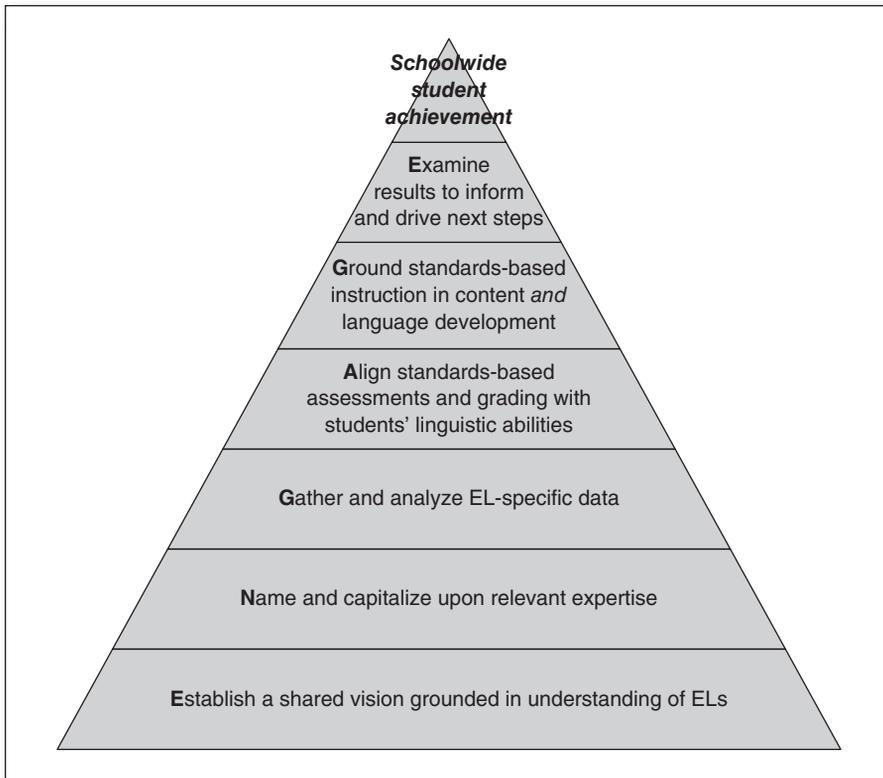
An overview of the model is presented in Figure 1.1.

- Establish a shared vision grounded in deep understanding of ELs.
- Name and capitalize upon relevant expertise within collaborative teams.
- Gather and analyze EL-specific data.
- Align standards-based assessments and grading with ELs’ current levels of linguistic and content development
- Ground standards-based instruction in both content *and* language development.
- Examine results to inform and drive next steps.

Note that each step in the ENGAGE model builds upon the previous step; a shared vision serves as the foundation for the progression through the steps toward the ultimate goal of increased schoolwide student achievement. Each of these incremental steps is described below.

- To *establish a shared vision for serving ELs*, schools and districts need to first understand and empathize with the backgrounds and stories of the students that they serve. Against this backdrop, educators must then work collaboratively to develop an informed vision for serving these students.
- *Naming the expertise to capitalize upon within collaborative teams* requires that *all* relevant stakeholders be gathered together to identify and

**Figure 1.1** Representation of how the ENGAGE Model Supports Schoolwide Student Achievement



share their individual areas of expertise. Concrete plans are then developed for appropriately incorporating every individual's relevant expertise/experience on behalf of English learners.

- *Gathering and analyzing EL-specific data* requires that, through a critical and EL-specific lens, administrators and teachers interrogate the data that are typically gathered about all students for their relevance and meaning. In addition, they must analyze additional EL data, including relevant classroom-based information, in order to gain the most accurate picture of what ELs know and can do. After interpreting EL-specific data, teachers are better positioned to appropriately conceptualize meaningful linguistic and content-based assignments/assessments.
- *To align standards-based assessments and grading with ELs' current levels of linguistic and content development*, schools and districts must match performance expectations with students' current levels of linguistic capability and content knowledge, skills, and

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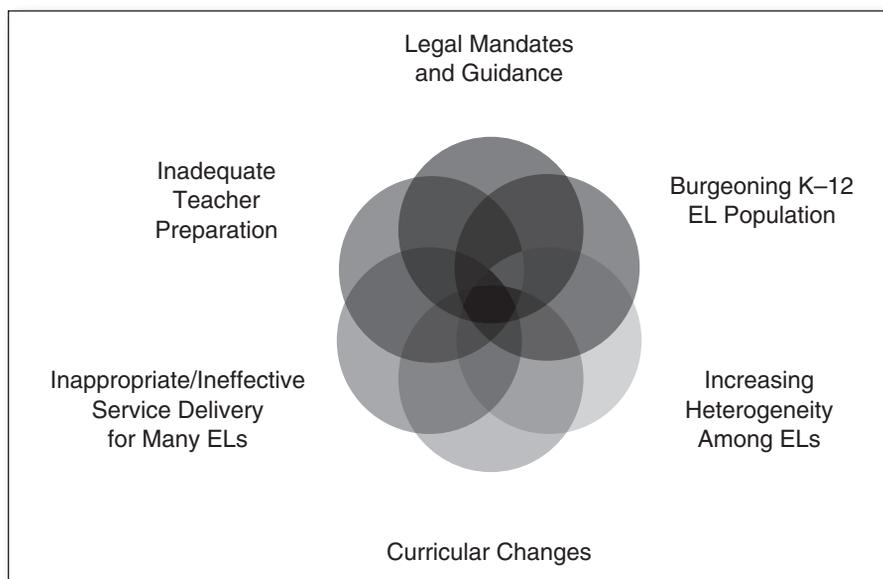
abilities, which facilitates simultaneous growth in both language and content development.

- Once teachers establish appropriate achievement expectations, they are better able to *ground standards-based instruction in both content and language development*. Such grounding means that teachers design and implement linguistically differentiated lessons that employ a range of EL-appropriate instructional practices designed to teach content and language simultaneously.
- *Examining results to inform and drive next steps* requires interpretation of EL-specific data collected throughout the teaching/learning process that informs subsequent teacher decision making and actions. This approach is much more effective than (and is preferred to) relying on a preconceived curricular scope and sequence and/or pacing guide.

### THE NEED FOR CHANGE

A constellation of local and national factors calls for a radical shift in school practice for English learners in the K–12 setting based on an effective driver, the ENGAGE model. These factors include legal mandates and guidance, a burgeoning K–12 EL population, increasing heterogeneity among ELs, curricular changes, inappropriate/ineffective service delivery for many ELs, and inadequate teacher preparation (see Figure 1.2).

**Figure 1.2** Factors That Create the Need for the ENGAGE Model



## Legal Mandates and Guidance

A number of documents detail the federal requirements for the education of ELs. In 1964, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act declared that

No person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

A follow-up memo to the Civil Rights Act (May 25, 1970, Memorandum, Department of Health, Education and Welfare) clarified the responsibility of school districts to provide equal opportunity to students with limited English language proficiency and to ensure that students were not placed in special education programming due simply to a lack of English language proficiency. The Bilingual Education Act, 1968 (amended in 1974 and 1978) encouraged the use of bilingual education and allocated funding to support this programming. The Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 prohibited the denial of student access to educational opportunities based on race, color, sex, or national origin. This act further pointed out the need to specifically address language barriers. These documents set the stage for court decisions that would follow.

In 1974, the Supreme Court ruled in *Lau v. Nichols* that, in terms of educational opportunities, identical is not equal. This ruling further charged districts to take steps to address ELs' linguistic needs. Less than a decade later, *Casteñada v. Pickard* (1981) provided three guidelines for EL programming:

1. Is the program theoretically sound or experimentally appropriate?
2. Is the program set up in a way that allows this theory to be put into practice?
3. Is the program regularly evaluated and adjusted to ensure that it is meeting the linguistic needs of the students it serves?

The following year, in *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), the US Supreme Court struck down the Texas law that allowed school districts to deny educational opportunities to children of undocumented immigrants. This ruling drew upon the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution, perceiving that children, rather than their parents, were effectively punished by such denial. Previously, California, *Diana v. State Board of Education* (1970) had mandated that ELs cannot be placed in special education programming

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based upon test results that do not separate language proficiency from disability, due to reliance on discriminatory linguistic demands within the test. More recently, the impact of noncompliance findings by the Civil Rights Division of the US Department of Justice and the Office for Civil Rights of the US Department of Education in Massachusetts (Settlement Agreement Between The United States of America and The Boston Public Schools, n.d.) has garnered the attention of states serving ELs. These findings, that some 45,000 general education teachers lacked training to work effectively with ELs, resulted in the requirement for statewide teacher training “developed by language-acquisition experts” (Maxwell, 2012, ¶4).

Early in 2015, the US Department of Justice and the US Department of Education issued joint guidance regarding ways to ensure that ELs can participate “meaningfully and equally in educational programs” (US Department of Justice & US Department of Education, 2015, p. 1). This document serves as a reminder regarding the legal obligations of state education agencies, school districts, and schools by specifically addressing such topics as identification, assessment, programming and program evaluation, staffing, access to curricular and extracurricular opportunities, parent communication, and exit practices. The document makes clear the seriousness of these requirements by concluding with contact information for agencies that address violations of these legal obligations.

The combination of all of the aforementioned legal mandates and guidance documents, arguably illuminates the need for a model of more effective inclusion of ELs in K–12 education. However, the rapidly growing population of English learners still finds itself struggling for access to curriculum.

### **Burgeoning K–12 EL Population**

The United States has seen a significant increase in the number of ELs in recent decades; Haynes (2012, p. 2), points out that “between 1980 and 2009, the number of school-aged children who spoke another language in the home more than doubled, from 4.7 (10 percent) to 11.2 million (21 percent).” More recently, the number of ELs in the United States grew by a stunning 63.54% between academic years 1994–1995 and 2009–2010 (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition [NCELA], 2011a). Further, demographers anticipate that by 2020, “Half of all public school students will have non-English-speaking backgrounds” (Haynes, 2012, p. 2). Individual states and school districts are experiencing a range of EL growth patterns. While some districts are experiencing significant and even overwhelming growth, others are experiencing more gradual changes. Districts with

low incidence of ELs, as well as those entirely new to serving ELs, both face daunting challenges. All of these enrollment realities point to the need for a clear-cut and consistent team-based model for engaging ELs in the curriculum. In addition to variable enrollments, the changing composition of the EL population is also notable.

### **Increasing Heterogeneity Among ELs**

The population of ELs across the United States continues to diversify in a phenomenon known as *microplurality*, or “diversity within diversity” (Grey & Devlin, n.d., slide 8). Microplurality, rather than focusing on racial differences, “recognizes the central role of culture, language, religion, and immigration status.” For example, language diversity within the United States has increased in recent decades (Shin & Kominski, 2010). While the US Census Bureau listed 325 languages spoken in the United States in 2004, this is likely an underrepresentation, as many languages with few speakers are not reported (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition [NCELA], 2011b). This noteworthy change in diversity of languages spoken across the United States, as well as the increased microplurality visible in culture, religion, and immigration status, has far-reaching implications for instructional approaches, materials, and assessments for ELs. The overarching demographic changes indicate that “business as usual” will not result in increased achievement for all of today’s K–12 students. Rather, all stakeholders in the educational process must work together to reconceptualize and implement a model that embraces and meets the distinct academic and sociocultural needs of the full range of English learners. While the K-12 student population is undergoing transformation, the curricula used in K-12 schools are simultaneously changing as well.

### **Curricular Changes**

The untenable achievement gap that persists between ELs and non-ELs (Fry, 2007) demands differentiated instruction and assessment based on EL-specific insights and research. Widely accepted curricular standards such as the Common Core State Standards, with their increased emphasis on rigor, have highlighted the need for such a differentiated approach that ensures effective instruction of *all* students that will afford them parity of access to standards-based achievement. The new standards-based environment provides an unprecedented opportunity for teachers, staff, and administrators to redouble efforts for engaging ELs in grade-level and content classrooms. Implementing a differentiated approach, teachers

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emphasize the learning of content, as well as its associated academic language, in new and creative ways. This newly envisioned task can be accomplished through a model designed to engage and advance the achievement of diverse learners: the ENGAGE model. Past attempts to facilitate access to curriculum have, all too often, resulted in services for ELs that were not matched with their needs.

### **Inappropriate/Ineffective Service Delivery for Many ELs**

Some districts struggle to distinguish language differences from exceptionalities, resulting in both frequent overrepresentation of ELs in special education programs (Hamayan, Marler, Sanchez-Lopez, & Damico, 2013) and underrepresentation of these students in programs for gifted/talented students (Castellano & Diaz, 2002). In addition, appropriate literacy instruction, which is a critical facilitator of academic success for all students, is often not provided to ELs; current research that illuminates best practice for EL literacy instruction is now available, but the needed modifications to classroom practice have yet to be enacted on a large scale (Goldberg, cited in Linan-Thompson & Vaughn, 2007). These issues with services for ELs have contributed to a dropout rate for ELs that is double that of non-ELs (Callahan, 2013). These disparities contribute to the urgent need for a radical shift in practice through a model designed to engage ELs in all aspects of instruction and assessment. Inappropriate/ineffective services can be attributed to a number of causes, including inadequate teacher preparation.

### **Inadequate Teacher Preparation**

Insufficient attention has been given to ensuring that all teachers are prepared to effectively teach and assess ELs (Walker & Stone, 2011), despite the fact that most teachers will have ELs in their classrooms (Samson & Collins, 2012). More specifically, in the 2009–2010 academic year, “73 percent [of district EL program administrators] reported that ‘lack of expertise among mainstream teachers to address the needs of ELs [English learners]’ was a moderate or major challenge” (US Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, 2012, p. xxvi).

The educational literature recommends that a variety of topics be infused into such teacher preparation. For instance, Staehr Fenner (2013) discusses the necessity of addressing the dual demands of English language proficiency standards layered upon content standards. In addition, a review of the literature reveals that a foundational knowledge base of all

teachers of ELs must include oral language development, academic language, and cultural sensitivity (Samson & Collins, 2012, p. 2). Finally, Jones-Vo and Fairbairn (2012, A New Paradigm section, ¶2) emphasize that all teachers who serve ELs must

- Know [their] students
- Increase comprehensibility
- Increase interaction
- Increase higher-order thinking
- Make connections to previous learning
- Differentiate instruction and assessment according to ELP [English language proficiency] levels
- Match grading to differentiated expectations

All of these components combine to promote the simultaneous learning of language and content when conducted collaboratively. Inadequate teacher preparation that fails to include all of these factors has contributed to the need for a new model of EL teaching and assessment practice in the K–12 context.

## **IMPLEMENTING THE ENGAGE MODEL**

The ENGAGE model constitutes a meaningful collaborative response to significant needs of ELs, including the factors described above. This team-based model will serve as an effective driver of districtwide and/or schoolwide change that leads to improved EL achievement in the K–12 setting. The ENGAGE model calls upon individual teachers, district/school leaders, and other stakeholders to unify and move forward as productive advocates on behalf of all students and of English learners in particular.

District/school leaders are advised at the outset that, when viewed through the eyes of a single individual, the tasks involved in engaging ELs equitably across an entire district/school could seem daunting. The authors recognize that comprehensive descriptions and summaries of leadership team tasks might seem overwhelming, but only if these tasks are perceived as responsibilities shouldered solely by an individual or by a small leadership group. District/school leaders are encouraged to exhibit shared leadership to distribute responsibilities among all stakeholders, encouraging their contributions in an unlimited variety of ways, such as

- Empowering teacher leaders to work in meaningful ways
- Capitalizing upon existing professional learning community structures to analyze needs and relevant data

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- Delegating tasks such as scheduling meetings, collecting information or research, posting documents, and communicating with others
- Seeking input from outside experts, representative first-person voices, and others
- Networking with other districts/schools that are experienced in meeting EL needs
- Participating in relevant professional development
- Adapting the components of the ENGAGE model to match the district- or school-specific context

Through advance planning and widespread distribution of shared responsibilities, district/school leaders will ultimately benefit by streamlining the implementation of the ENGAGE model.

Since these leadership teams will spearhead the implementation of change and refinement in order to engage ELs across the district/school, they must be well versed in the necessary components shouldered by each and every other stakeholder. In order to facilitate such a “balcony view” of individual contexts and roles, the authors have provided descriptions of the ENGAGE model roles across all constituent groups. These descriptions should not intimidate any participants in the implementation process. The authors expect that providing this comprehensive awareness will empower visionary district/school leaders to more seamlessly implement the change process. By sharing a range of tasks and responsibilities at the inception and shouldering the work together, district/school leaders will lighten their individual loads and pave the way for realization of their shared vision. This is meant as encouragement to leaders, so that when previewing the collective and collaborative processes of implementing the ENGAGE model, they recognize the collegial nature and unified spirit inherent in the endeavor.

As district/school leaders consider adopting the ENGAGE model, they are reminded of the iterative nature of this process, and the fact that full implementation will likely take multiple years. The authors have worked with districts/schools at various stages of EL engagement. Such exemplary districts/buildings have been working at fully engaging ELs for a number of years, and constantly refine their work in a cycle of continuous improvement. Exactly how long implementing the ENGAGE model will take depends on many variables within each district/school. Patience and persistence will be key to moving forward as, based on demographic projections, the need to continually refine efforts to engage ELs in standards-based instruction is certain not to diminish. Districts/schools might start by examining and identifying the most important issues at hand, and then, using a backward planning process, break down appropriate next steps. In this way, they can make progress in meaningful, if small, steps.

Ultimately, this book is intended as a field book to be referenced by all stakeholders, but also freely adapted to meet specific school/district needs. Certain steps might be taken out of sequence, if that makes sense for a specific context. The authors hope that this book will be a well-used source of guidance and will provide a common language that will support and unite all stakeholders in accomplishing their shared goal of increasing EL academic achievement. Each chapter of the remainder of this book will explicate one component of the ENGAGE model:

- Establish a shared vision grounded in deep understanding of ELs.
- Name the expertise to capitalize upon within collaborative teams.
- **G**ather and analyze EL-specific data.
- **A**lign standards-based assessments and grading with ELs' current levels of linguistic and content development.
- **G**round standards-based instruction in both content *and* language development.
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