Guidance for Teaching Literacy in Multilingual Settings

Skills Progressions: Oral Language and Academic Discourse

Transitional Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve



California Department of Education

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Using the Multilingual Skills Progression Documents

Purpose and Intent

California's Literacy Roadmap shapes the statewide approach to literacy and biliteracy, interlacing evidence-based and research-aligned practices that attend to the cultural and linguistic diversity of students across our state. This **Guidance for Teaching Literacy in Multilingual Settings** is offered in parallel to literacy guidance available for English-medium classrooms, adding both vivid distinction and subtle yet critical nuance to biliteracy instruction in multilingual programs.

Informed by research, practitioners, and subject matter experts, this guidance is a companion resource for transitional kindergarten through grade twelve (TK–12) dual language educators, including bilingual general and special education teachers, paraprofessionals, literacy coaches, and dual language education program leaders, to support the planning and delivery of effective biliteracy instruction and improve literacy outcomes for all students. While robust, this installment is merely a jumping-off point from earlier guidance, opening the door to further elaboration on dual language program implementation, including multilingual assessment, dual language education leadership, and more.

Rather than serving as a scope and sequence, curriculum map, or pacing guide, this resource intends to honor and reflect rich literacy instruction across many languages and multilingual education program models (e.g., dual language immersion, developmental bilingual, heritage language). Offering practical guidelines for making curricular and instructional decisions, the resource embraces the diversity of instructional approaches, time allocations, and culturally responsive practices needed to support the unique features of each language. Specifically, the skills progressions documents include augmentations for 15 different languages (each published separately) to specialize instruction.

Using This Guidance

The Guidance for Teaching Literacy in Multilingual Settings is designed for bilingual practitioners statewide. Educators should use this guidance alongside the California Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (CA CCSS ELA/Literacy), the California English Language Development Standards (CA ELD Standards), the California World Languages Standards (WL Standards), and the Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations (PTKLF) as indicated by grade span. All of these, together with related biliteracy resources, guide the following:

- Individual educators as they set priorities and refine their instructional practices.
- Team discussions on instructional materials and approaches, assessment results in both program languages, and acceleration, remediation, and needed interventions.
- Schoolwide and individual plans for professional learning, including coaching.
- Development of school and district biliteracy plans, including a Multi-Tiered System of Support, analysis of the implementation of instruction across all literacy areas, and selection of curricula and assessment instruments.

This guidance is to be used in tandem with high-quality, authentic biliteracy instructional materials; deep knowledge of language, biliteracy development, and culturally affirming approaches; an understanding of students' language and lived experiences; and other dual language and biliteracy instructional resources as a starting point for biliteracy instructional decision-making.

Appendix A of the Guidance for Teaching Literacy in Multilingual Settings contains **guiding questions** designed to support teaching teams as they engage in instructional planning in multilingual programs, with the goal of maximizing instructional impact in both languages while avoiding redundancy.

By integrating oral language development, foundational literacy skills, reading comprehension and writing instruction, and cross-linguistic pedagogy, teachers empower students to succeed academically while honoring their linguistic and cultural assets. In this way, multilingual literacy instruction not only supports academic achievement but also advances equity and prepares students for participation in an increasingly interconnected world (García and Kleyn 2016; California Department of Education 2020).

Organization of This Guidance

The centerpiece of this guidance is a series of four skills progressions documents. Each document is arranged by grade spans to assist educators in identifying a general entry point to their biliteracy instructional planning. Students bring a range of existing language and literacy experiences in English and the partner language, and their developmental characteristics and contexts shape their biliteracy learning trajectories. As a result, students in a given year will have different entry points, and it is up to educators to understand precisely each student's strengths and needs with respect to literacy skills in the languages of instruction.

The skills progressions are organized into the following **Core Areas of Literacy in Multilingual Programs**:

- Oral Language and Academic Discourse
- Foundational Literacy Skills
- Reading
- Writing

In addition to addressing the core areas of literacy, the progressions documents also feature:

- **Grade Spans:** Understanding that students develop literacy in two languages at different rates, the progressions are arranged by grade spans to provide practitioners a “mile marker” to determine where a student might enter the progressions. This also allows practitioners to look across, beyond, or before the span associated with particular grade levels for various skills to plan differentiation. Grade spans represented are TK–2, 3–5, 6–8, and 9–12.
- **What Students Do:** Skill progression descriptions aligned to the standards indicate how students develop biliteracy and academic skills over time.
- **Evidence-Based Strategies:** Examples of evidence-based instructional strategies are provided that support multilingual learners across grade spans, levels of language and literacy development, and program models.
- **Standards:** Standards are provided to highlight anticipated learning outcomes and to assist time-constrained bilingual teachers who often develop much of their own curricula and must identify literacy learning milestones. Additionally, the skills progression documents that support Spanish and English instruction include two additional resources: the California Common Core en Español and the California Spanish Language Development Standards (CA SLD Standards).
- **Language Considerations:** Strategies and linguistic features are provided to assist educators in understanding and teaching the languages most prominently represented in dual language education programs in California, including Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Arabic, Hebrew, Russian, Ukrainian, Mixtec, Hmong, Khmer, Portuguese, and Filipino. Skills progression documents in the various languages are available via the California Department of Education Literacy Roadmap web page.

Each skills progression document focuses on one language in the Language Considerations column.

The Literacy Roadmap web page includes these Skills Progression documents, the Illustrative Multilingual Literacy Scenarios, study guides, a glossary, and the research and references that support the guidance. These can be used with adopted curricula to support biliteracy instruction.

Skills Progressions: Oral Language and Academic Discourse

Oral language is the foundation of all later literacy and academic development, and in bilingual programs, it plays a particularly pivotal role. Through structured opportunities to speak, listen, and negotiate meaning in both languages, students build the linguistic flexibility and confidence they need to engage with increasingly complex content for an extended or sustained duration. High-quality oral language instruction goes far beyond casual conversation; it includes intentional modeling of academic vocabulary, sentence structures, and discourse patterns that students will later encounter in reading and writing. When teachers create academic routines such as partner talk, collaborative problem solving, and structured discussions, they give multilingual learners the space to rehearse ideas, test hypotheses, and refine their thinking in ways that written tasks alone cannot accomplish.

Academic discourse extends this work by teaching students how to use language for specific academic purposes—explaining reasoning, comparing perspectives, constructing arguments, and engaging in evidence-based dialogue. These discourse practices are not innate; they must be explicitly taught, modeled, and scaffolded, especially for students developing proficiency in more than one language. When classrooms normalize rich, purposeful talk, students learn to participate in the intellectual work of school, rather than just answer questions. They develop the ability to articulate complex ideas, listen critically, question, and build on one another's contributions. For multilingual learners, this kind of discourse is a powerful driver of both language development and content mastery, helping them internalize the linguistic and cognitive moves that underpin academic success.

Abbreviations for Standards

- **CA ELD:** California English Language Development Standards
- **CCSS ELA:** California Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts
- **PTKLF:** California Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations
- **WL:** World Languages Standards
- **CCSS AL en español:** Common Core State Standards Artes de lenguaje en español
- **CA SLD:** California Spanish Language Development Standards

Grades TK–2



What Students Do

- Students, in both program languages, progress from using isolated words and phrases to basic, high-frequency grammar patterns in simple sentences, and then to a broader range of grammatical forms and sentence types.
- Students progressively develop the ability to use word and sentence structures to express thoughts and ideas, learning to flexibly construct and revise sentences to communicate clearly in formal and informal contexts, using visuals when appropriate to support and enhance communication.
- Students engage in increasingly sustained exchanges, moving from recounting familiar experiences to sharing opinions, responding to texts, and asking and answering questions.
- Students move from exploring word meanings through concrete experiences and connections to organizing and defining vocabulary and independently distinguishing subtle shades of meaning and using precise vocabulary to clarify ideas and support understanding across contexts.
- Students make cross-linguistic comparisons, such as noticing differences in linking words and word order, and applying this understanding in their sharing, retelling, and answering and asking questions.

Related Standards TK–2

CCSS ELA: SL. K–2.1–6; L.K–2.1–6

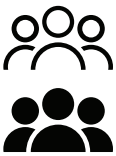
PTKLF: LS.TK–1.1-1.6, 1.8

CA ELD: Collaborative PI. K–2.1–3; Interpretive PI. K–2.5–6; Productive PI. K–2.12; Structuring Cohesive Texts PII.K–2.2

WL: Communication, Comparisons

CCSS AL en español: AE. K–2.1–6

CA SLD: Colaborativo PI. K–2.1–3; Interpretativo PI. K–2.5–6; Productivo PI. K–2.12; Estructurar Textos Cohesivos PII.K–2.2



Evidence-Based Practices

- Create and maintain predictable and structured oral language practice routines to use in both languages.
- Build in active listening, turn-taking, and idea building as a part of discourse activities.

- Model sentence frames and sentence starters with visuals. Slowly remove scaffolds as students master the intended language.
- Use gestures/realia to support oral storytelling and build conceptual vocabulary in both languages.
- Use visuals and props from students' cultural backgrounds in retells.
- Validate oral traditions as literacy-building resources.
- Prompt students to notice **linking words** and sequence words across languages.
- Model respectful listening for cultural differences in storytelling styles.
- Support students to ask questions to clarify ideas in one language, then refine in the other language.
- Provide immediate oral feedback on clarity and completeness.
- Use call-and-response songs, rhymes, and culturally familiar stories to highlight rhythm and sequencing.
- Use side-by-side language bridging charts to compare and contrast vocabulary, transitions, and grammatical structures across languages.
- Explicitly teach cognates, language-specific vocabulary, and academic terms across both languages.
- Use text-based discussion prompts that require students to cite details from texts in one or both languages.
- Facilitate collaborative retelling and response activities using oral language, drawing, and writing.
- Connect oral language activities to reading and writing experiences in both languages.
- Prompt students to select increasingly precise words when speaking, reading, and writing.
- Use graphic organizers to support oral presentations and bilingual storytelling.

Spanish Language Considerations

- Support students in noticing noun and adjective agreement in gender and number (e.g., *el perro blanco/la casa blanca/los perros blancos/las casas blancas*).
- Recognize sentence structure in Spanish: Subject, verb, predicate. Compare/contrast with English or other languages.
- Verb conjugation: explicitly teach that each pronoun has a specific verb form ending, while the root stays the same in regular verbs (*Yo* cant-o, *Tú* cant-as, *Él* Cant-a, etc.). Address conjugation in relation to the audience.
- Introduce regular and irregular verbs. Use sentence patterns, conjugate common verbs (ser, haber, estar, tener, querer), and introduce present, past, and future simple tenses in retelling stories.
- Introduce use of common reflexive verbs and pronouns, i.e., *me llamo, me gustan, se hace, levántate, including moods*.

Grades 3–5

What Students Do

- Students engage in sustained collaborative discussions, paraphrasing and building on peers' ideas in both languages. They justify opinions with evidence and pose and respond to questions, further explaining their position.
- Students move from recognizing and observing differences in speech to differentiating speech that calls for different registers, adapting to a variety of tasks, and using formal or informal speech in both languages.
- Students move from foundational grammar and vocabulary to more nuanced language use. They consolidate and refine speaking skills while placing

Related Standards 3–5

CCSS ELA: SL.3–5.1–6; L.3–5.1–6

CA ELD: Collaborative PI.3–5.1–4; Interpretive PI.3–5.5–6; Productive PI.3–5.11–12; Structuring Cohesive Texts PII.3–5.1–2; Connecting and Condensing Ideas; PII.3–5.6

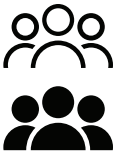
WL: Communication, Comparisons

CCSS AL en español: AE.3–5.1–6

CA SLD: Colaborativo PI.3–5.1–4; Interpretativo PI.3–5.5–6; Productivo PI.3–5.11-12; Estructurar Textos Cohesivos PII.3–5.1-2; Conectar y Condensar Ideas PII.3–5.6

increasing emphasis on word choice, vocabulary depth, and complex sentences.

- Students progress from reporting on a topic, telling a story, or recounting an experience using relevant facts and descriptive details, and clear pacing to presenting on a topic, text, or opinion with logically sequenced ideas.



Evidence-Based Practices

- Facilitate structured talk routines (Think-Pair-Share, Reciprocal Teaching) or discussion protocols.
- Use bilingual anchor charts for discussion norms.
- Provide bilingual discussion stems for agreeing, disagreeing, clarifying, and elaborating.
- Use **bridging** activities to compare and contrast vocabulary, transitions, grammatical structures, and speech registers across languages. Bridging can also be used to identify cognates, analyze false cognates, and compare transition or linking words across languages.
- Engage students in role-play activities requiring different registers and purposes.
- Support student planning in one language and presenting in the other. Provide sentence starters/frames for elaboration, agreement, and/or disagreement in each language as needed. Slowly remove scaffolds as students master the use of the language.
- Scaffold academic phrases for cultural comparisons (e.g., “In my culture …,” “Similar to …”).
- Highlight similarities/differences in linking words and transitions across languages.
- Compare how cultural perspectives shape oral narratives and explanations.
- Highlight cognates, morphology, and language-specific vocabulary patterns that support transfer across languages.
- Use graphic organizers to support oral presentations and bilingual storytelling.
- Model how to reference a peer’s idea in each language.



Spanish Language Considerations

- Introduce and classify linking words according to their function, such as:
  - **Present ideas:** Primero, Para empezar, En primer lugar;
  - **Addition:** y, también, además;
  - **Emphasis:** sobre todo, lo más importante, especialmente;
  - **Agreement:** sí, claro, por su puesto;
  - **Disagreement:** pero no, sin embargo;
  - **Cause and effect:** porque, por eso, ya que;
  - **Condition:** si, a menos que;
  - **Contrast:** pero, sin embargo, aunque; temporal: cuando, antes de, después de, luego; and
  - **Summarizing:** en resumen, en conclusión, al final.
- Highlight cognates and false cognates (e.g., *ropa ≠ rope*) and partial cognates/false cognates (Example: *To support* is not always the same as *soportar; army ≠ armada*).
- Scaffold oral debates by teaching discourse markers, like *sin embargo* (however) or *por lo tanto* (therefore).

Grades 6–8



What Students Do

- Students engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions in both languages (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher led) with diverse partners on grade-level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly, as they progress from prepared participation using evidence to more independent, strategic engagement, including posing questions to refining or justifying views based on evidence.
- Students adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of both languages (formal) when appropriate, as they progress from applying foundational conventions to using precise language and applying advanced grammar and punctuation to clarify meaning and refine expression.
- Students present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically using relevant details and effective delivery (e.g., eye contact, volume, pronunciation), as they progress from developing organized, informative presentations to constructing coherent arguments with evidence and counterarguments and refining presentations that emphasize key ideas through sound reasoning, appropriate details, and increasingly sophisticated techniques, including varied transitions and conclusions that support and reflect the experience.

Related Standards 6–8

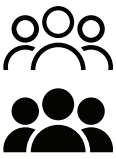
CCSS ELA: SL.6–8.1–6; L.6–8.1–6

CA ELD: Collaborative PI.6–8.1–4; Interpretive PI.6–8.5–6; Productive PI.6-8.11–12; Structuring Cohesive Texts PII.6–8.1–2; Connecting and Condensing Ideas; PII.6–8.6

WL: Communication, Cultures

CCSS AL en español: AE.6–8.1–6

CA SLD: Colaborativo PI.68.1–4; Interpretativo PI.6–8.5–6; Productivo PI.6–8.11–12; Estructurar Textos Cohesivos PII.6–8.1–2; Conectar y Condensar Ideas PII.6–8.6



Evidence-Based Practices

- Facilitate structured talk routines or discussion protocols and establish regular routines that support them.
- Teach explicit discussion strategies for disagreeing respectfully.

- Encourage **translanguaging** in group work (e.g., brainstorm in one/both languages, present in one language).
- Highlight cultural norms in discourse (directness vs. indirectness) and practice respectful engagement.
- Point out an evidence-introducing phrase (e.g., “The author states that …”) in one language and ask students to identify the equivalent in the other.
- Use multilingual sources representing diverse communities for oral presentations.
- Give feedback on the precision of academic vocabulary in both languages.
- Model shifts among formal, informal, and disciplinary registers.
- Teach students to incorporate academic vocabulary, transition phrases, and evidence strategically during presentations in both languages.
- Provide feedback on clarity, pacing, pronunciation, eye contact, and use of visual or multimedia supports to strengthen communication in both languages.



Spanish Language Considerations

- Compare cultural communication norms such as directness in Spanish discourse with English expectations (Give me a pencil. / *¿Me das un lapiz?*). Scaffold register shifts between informal (*tú*) and formal (*usted*). Highlight academic phrases used in argumentation (first, however, therefore / *por lo tanto, sin embargo, en primer lugar*).
- Important: Geographical and cultural differences in the use of personal pronouns in second person vs. third person. Zuñiga explains that language and languaging are always situated (e.g., the use of *Usted/vos* in some Spanish varieties does not reflect a more formal register) (2019).

Grades 9–12



What Students Do

- Students initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative conversations on grade-level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively, as they progress from prepared participation using studied materials to leading and sustaining discourse by posing questions, connecting ideas, synthesizing perspectives, and refining or justifying views based on evidence.
- Students progress from evaluating a speaker's argument—including their reasoning, evidence, and rhetorical choices, and identifying any fallacies or distortions—to conducting a deeper analysis of how a speaker constructs meaning through stance, word choice, tone, and the connections between ideas.

Related Standards 9–12

CCSS ELA: SL.9–12.1–6; L.9–12.1–6

CA ELD: Collaborative PI.9–12.1–4; Interpretive PI.9–12.5–7; Productive PI.9–12.9,11–12; Structuring Cohesive Texts PII.9–12.1–2; Connecting and Condensing Ideas PII.9–12.6

WL: Communication, Comparisons

CCSS AL en español: AE.9–12.1–6

CA SLD: Colaborativo PI.9–12.1–4; Interpretativo PI.9–12.5–7; Productivo PI.9–12.9, 11–12; Estructurar Textos Cohesivos PII.9–12.1–2; Conectar y Condensar Ideas PII.9–12.6



Evidence-Based Practices

- Facilitate structured talk routines or discussion protocols (Socratic Seminar, Fishbowl).
- Highlight cross-linguistic rhetorical strategies (direct/indirect; deductive/inductive).
- Encourage bilingual presentations that incorporate cultural heritage content.
- Engage students in multilingual presentations or debates that require them to synthesize information from multiple sources and evaluate the effectiveness of different media in conveying ideas.
- Guide the incorporation of evidence from multilingual sources.

- Engage students in cross-language analysis of texts, issues, and perspectives, encouraging transfer of ideas across languages.
- Model academic words and phrases that express a person's opinion or argument (e.g., "The evidence suggests …").
- Provide feedback on precision, register, and cultural appropriateness.
- Utilize translanguaging as another oral resource to accurately describe feelings, situations, or cultural nuances. Translanguaging should be used strategically to add meaning, value, and identity content to an academic or informal presentation.
- Initiate and sustain academic discussions; evaluate speaker reasoning and evidence; present information and arguments clearly; adapt speech to audience and purpose; use grammar and vocabulary strategically.
- Facilitate discussions that require students to evaluate and address multiple perspectives, drawing on diverse linguistic and cultural viewpoints.



Spanish Language Considerations

- Explore Spanish rhetorical traditions (e.g., inductive argumentation starts with observations and ends with conclusion); reliance on proverbs is more common in Spanish than English and can function like mini-arguments: *Debemos terminar lo que empezamos; ya sabes, "el que persevera, alcanza.*"
- Teach stance markers (*quizás, es probable que*) and support bilingual presentations using sources from Spanish-speaking countries.