ROCKY VIEW SCHOOLS

English as an Additional Language
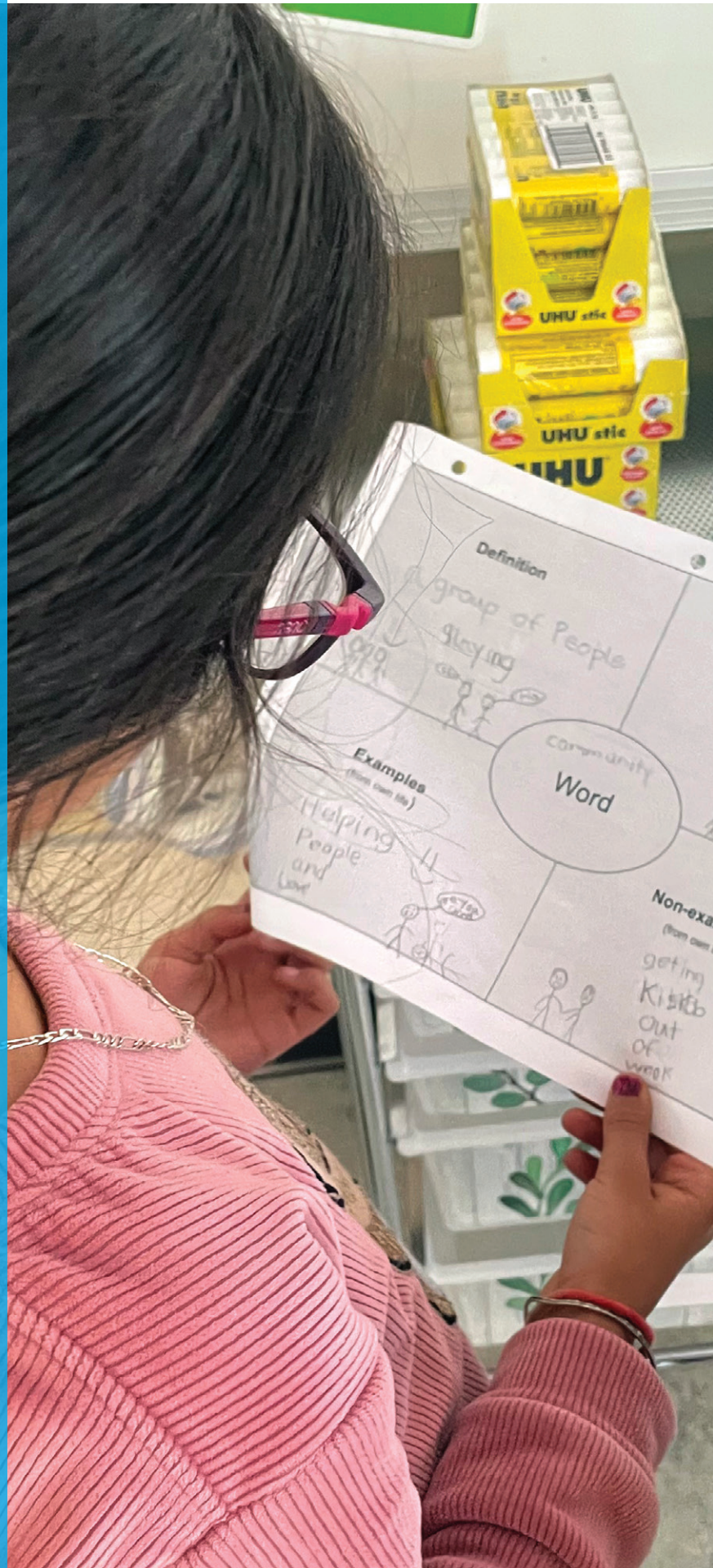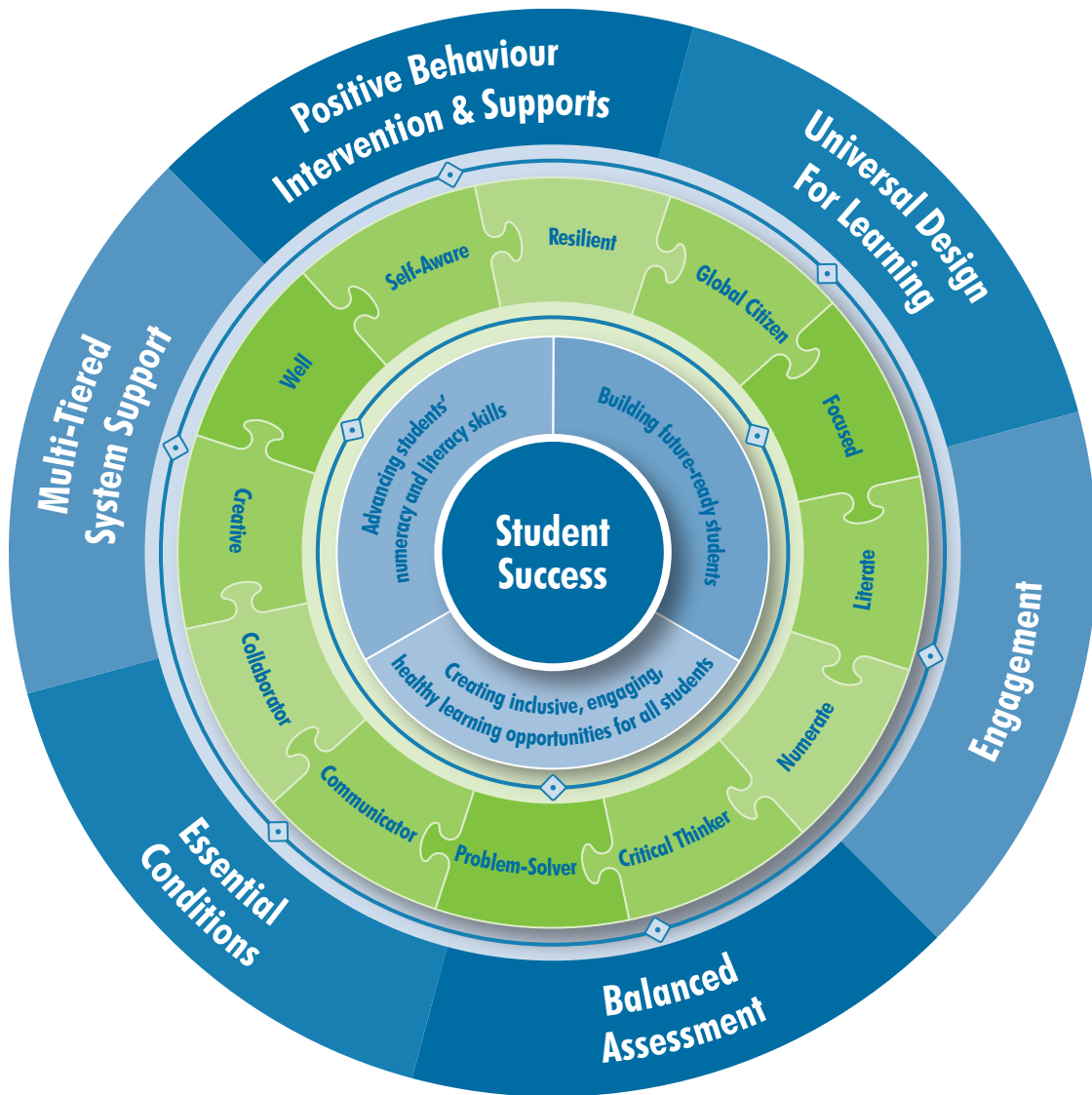## Practice Guide

February, 2024

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Learning Model

Introduction

Rocky View Schools (RVS) is dedicated to serving a diverse student population, including those learning English as an Additional Language (EAL). Recognizing the importance of supporting these students, the district emphasizes effective, empathetic instruction to inspire and reward not only EAL learners but also their peers and the educational community. All teachers are considered educators of English language and literacy, ensuring that instruction is tailored to meet individual needs, and equipping students to meet Alberta's rigorous curriculum.

The success of EAL students in RVS is a collaborative effort involving teachers, administrators, and parents. A comprehensive blueprint has been developed, focusing on building bridges to academic and social-emotional success by employing evidence-based strategies, such as differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning, and culturally responsive teaching. Targeted supports like sheltered instruction (teaching language through content curriculum), push in small group support, and co-teaching models are implemented to address specific language needs, fostering an environment that celebrates diversity and nurtures belonging.

The vision for EAL learning in RVS is centered on empowering students to be confident communicators in English while valuing their cultural backgrounds. The practice guide serves as a starting point for an equitable and multifaceted approach, integrating best practices in language acquisition, language learning, and technology. This concerted effort aims to cultivate an environment where all students have equitable opportunities to excel academically and reach their full potential and promoting inclusivity and diversity within the educational community.

EAL & ESL Explanation

RVS continues to make use of both EAL (English as an Additional Language) and ESL (English as a Second Language) in some of our communication. ESL is reflective of the term used by Alberta Education in all current documentation around the proficiency benchmarks that schools in RVS are required to use — referred to as ESL Proficiency Benchmarks. Our use of the term ESL Proficiency Benchmarks is to mitigate any possible confusion about the documentation process. Alberta Education is moving toward the adoption of the term EAL, and this will also be used in Benchmarks version 2.0.

The adoption (2024/25) of Alberta Education's EAL Benchmarks 2.0, available in draft form here, will require some updates to the EAL Practice Guide (2023), including links to resources published by Alberta Education. The move from ESL Proficiency Benchmarks (Benchmarks 1.0) to Benchmarks 2.0 will not necessarily affect the processes described throughout the EAL Practice Guide (2023). It will, however, affect the way assessment data is recorded and shared for English language learners within RVS.

Initial Intake & EAL Code Assignment

A family has registered their child with your school and identified that English is not the primary language spoken in the home. What are your next steps?

1. **Reach out to the Family/Guardians**
   • Gather basic information about their history and prior formal schooling.
   • Is the main home language(s) one other than English?
   • What is the main home language(s)?

   Considerations before Initial Family Conference

   • Interpretation and translation services may be required, both for conversations with families, and also to understand educational documents from the student's previous school history. See Translation and Interpretive Services, below.

   • Some families new to Canada may have left their last country of residence under circumstances that prevented them from bringing important documents, including academic reports.

   • Some parents may be hesitant to share their child's language, developmental, or educational histories with their new school.

   • Parents may identify that English is the main language spoken at home. This could be due to fear of non-academic placement for their child because they have the misconception that speaking English at home rather than their home language is the right thing for their child, or because they fear that their child will not be accepted into the school without English proficiency.

   • The home language of the student may be different from the language of instruction at the student's previous school.

   • Students may or may not be fluent and literate in all languages they speak.

   • Subsequent interviews and conversations with the student's family may be necessary in order to gain a detailed understanding of their background. This will help to contribute to the student's successful inclusion in the school and classroom community.

   • Encourage families to maintain their home languages as it has been proven to enhance English language acquisition and student success.

   • Ask if there are cultural holidays or customs that the school should be aware of.

   • A student who was born outside of Canada and has entered Canada as a refugee will typically require English as an additional language (EAL) or Francisation supports as well as significant additional supports and services to address considerations such as limited or disrupted formal schooling and possible exposure to traumatic events. These students are concurrently managing these considerations, while at the same time adjusting to an unfamiliar school, language, and culture.

2. **Initial Family Conference**
   • The school team prepares materials for an academic screening to determine if the student qualifies for EAL support.
   • Use the Family Conference Questionnaire page found in the APPENDIX to record information.
   • While the parents are sharing information, the student can complete the initial screening assessment.

3. **Student Screening Assessment – Recommended Best Practice**

   Initial intake assessment may include the following:
   - Fountas and Pinell Benchmark Assessment System assessment with comprehension conversation (remember that the "where to start" word list may be less accurate in identifying a starting point with comprehension for EAL learners)
   - Unedited writing sample – See Student Writing samples
   - Oral language listening skill assessment (CBE Oral Language screening tool)

   This intake screening assessment is meant to guide classroom placement, plan for support and identify a starting point on the Alberta Education ESL Benchmarks. Full Benchmark assessments will be conducted by a classroom teacher throughout the school year. See below.

4. **Coding**
   - If applicable, check to see if siblings in the family have also been identified as EAL within the division.
   - For Grades 1 – 12, obtaining parent permission to apply EAL coding is recommended but not required. If collected, parent permission suffices for the duration that coding is necessary. Ongoing parental communication about coding, placement, and progress is considered best practice.
   - Before assigning an EAL code, it must be determined that the student will require English Language supports. Parent identification is not sufficient.
   - If, through the intake process, screening, and classroom formative assessment, it has been determined that a student requires English language support, the appropriate coding will be entered into PowerSchool and Benchmarks will be initiated in Dossier. See below.

5. **Placement**
   - As a school team, decide on placement. Placement considerations may include:
   - Is there a class with other EAL students? Consider equitable numbers across grade level classrooms.
   - Is small group push-in support possible at your school for EAL Level 1or 2 students?
   - Are high school students eligible for credits from courses taken in their last school (credit transfer)?
   - Sheltered English language instruction (integrating language and content instruction)
   - Are there locally developed courses to support English language learning needs?
   - What is a timely school start date that best suits student needs?

6. **Entry Plan**
   - Part of the intake process is ensuring that there is a plan for the student's first day in the building. The school-based team will consult to ensure that the student and their family feel welcomed, and the student is supported in an age-appropriate manner.
   - Provide any supporting materials that would be helpful for their transition into school: School maps and schedules, a transportation plan, school supplies, lunch requirements, contact information, supporting visuals, etc.
   - Ensure parents know which door the student will enter and exit, and ensure that the student is walked to class, or the classroom teacher meets them at the front office on the first day.
   - Classroom teacher should ensure that the student has a tour of the school and a friendly "buddy" for their initial days.

Translation and Interpretive Services

Rocky View Immigrant Services (RVIS) provides translation and interpretation services with the support of Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS).

- Services can be in person, by phone or video call. Charges apply. Submit an online request at http://www.ccisinterpretation.ca/

- For additional questions or support, please contact:
  Banafsheh Ashrafi, Coordinator of Interpretation and Translation service
  Direct: 403-514-8335
  Cell: 403-606-6985
  Email: bashrafi@ccisab.ca

- The Learning Services department is working to provide other resources for interpretation and translation services for RVS.

Assessment – Formative and Ongoing

For ongoing assessment and tracking of student progress, RVS requires the use of Alberta Education's ESL Proficiency Benchmarks. The benchmarks were designed for use by teachers in the classroom context. In RVS, Alberta Education's ESL Proficiency Benchmarks have been created electronically in the Dossier system. Please see Using the ESL Benchmarks for Ongoing Assessment and Reporting.

Annual language proficiency assessments, using the Alberta Education ESL Benchmarks, as well as ongoing monitoring and documentation of students' language proficiency development is also required to inform instructional planning and the provision of timely and appropriate learning supports.

Grades 1 – 6: ongoing benchmark assessments will typically be conducted by the classroom teacher.

Grades 7 – 12: the EAL coordinator and/or administration will determine which teacher(s) will be the most responsible to complete the benchmarks. It is recommended that the teacher who has the most exposure to the student's language proficiency completes the benchmarks, and this includes input from other teachers. Language instruction is the responsibility of ALL teachers, irrespective of discipline. Only one teacher should be identified as the person responsible for completing the final draft of the benchmark so that not all teachers are completing a full benchmark.

The Alberta K-12 ESL Proficiency Benchmarks, located on the *Supporting English Language Learners* website, were developed to guide EAL programming and to support teachers in:

- monitoring and reporting progress
- planning for explicit instruction within everyday classroom learning
- communicating with students and parents to develop an understanding of language proficiency
- providing descriptions of language ability demonstrated at each proficiency level
- supporting initial identification of language proficiency level
- guiding effective instruction, goal setting, and program planning for English language learners

The benchmarks are designed to be used in conjunction with verbal, written and/or picture prompts as well as other tools used to illicit language from students so that benchmark levels can be determined. This evidence can be used to fulfil the Alberta Education funding manual requirement of an annual assessment of English language proficiency to support EAL coding. Teachers' running notes and everyday observations and assessments would provide examples of vocabulary, grammatical structures, and sentence types understood and used by students in their responses that correspond to proficiency levels described by the benchmarks.

When the benchmarks are used as part of an assessment protocol that fulfils the funding manual requirement of an annual assessment of language proficiency, no additional formal or informal assessments are required to support the EAL code. However, Alberta Education may request to review the components of the assessment package/protocol that was used with students, including the teacher's notations and comments related to a student's language proficiency.

Tracking and Using Benchmarks as the Annual Assessment

RVS requires an up-to-date Alberta Education ESL Proficiency Benchmark on file for each student identified as an EAL learner. ESL Proficiency Benchmarks have been created in Dossier. They must be completed electronically and reviewed/modified throughout the year.

The following must be on file and made available upon request:

- An updated ESL Proficiency Benchmark

- Any student that falls below a Level 1 or has IE (Insufficient Evidence) toggled on any of the 4 strands on the ESL benchmark must have a teacher comment included in Dossier to explain what the student can do.

- For any student that transfers out of RVS, an up to date/approved ESL Proficiency Benchmark must be in Dossier.
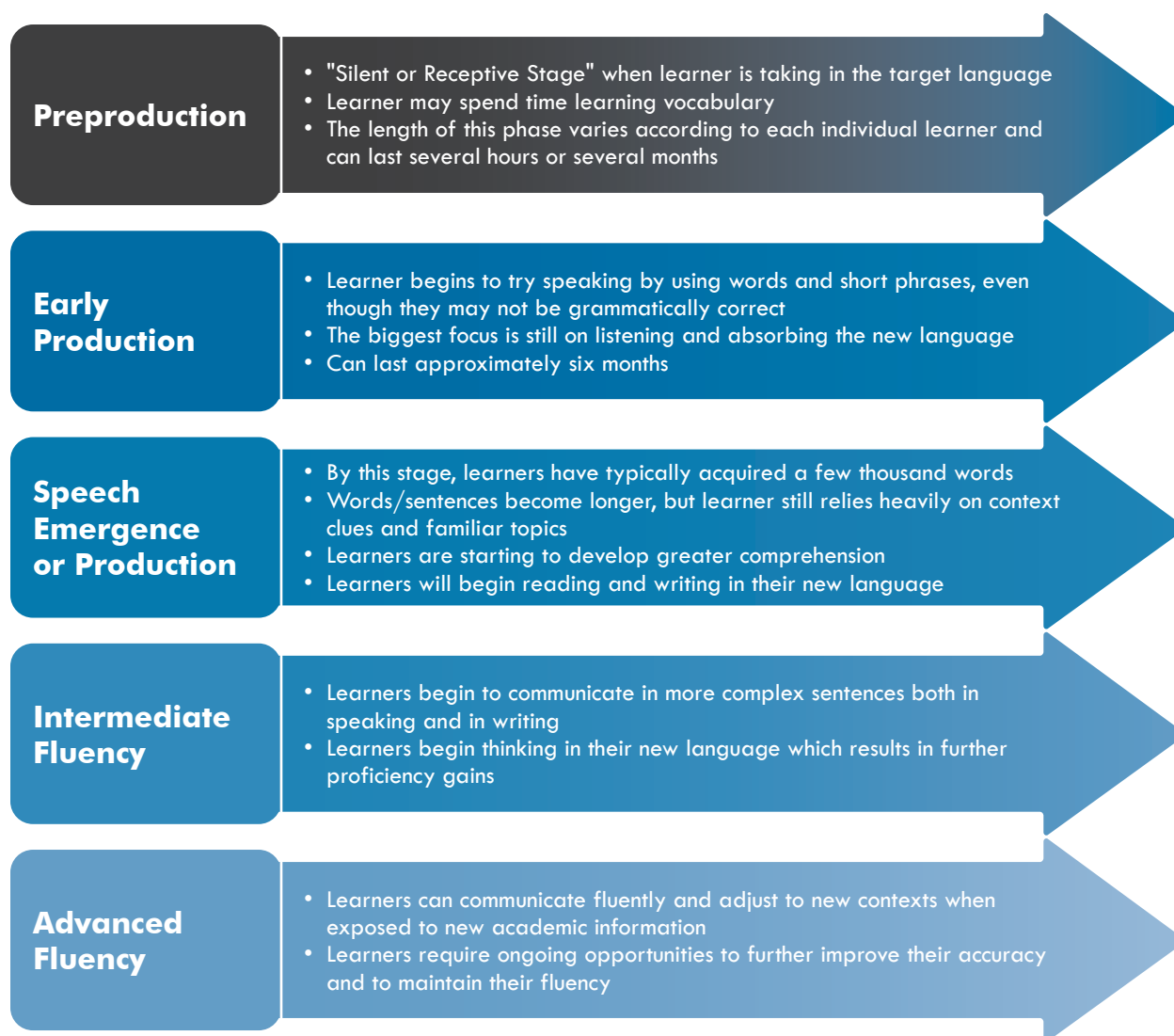
Programming and Best Practices

Gathering Data About Your Learners

Before the beginning of a new school year, it is important to know who your students will be, who on staff has experience, and what resources are available. This information will help you make decisions about how to organize your school to effectively meet the needs of all students, including English language learners.

See Learn Alberta: Gathering Data About Your Students, Staff, School, and Resources.

Stages of Language Development

It is important to recognize that English language learners, as with all learners, arrive with various cultural and educational experiences that will influence their development. Researchers, however, generally agree on five stages of language acquisition. Where English language learners lie on this continuum will help determine the appropriate programming for their success.

Preproduction
- "Silent or Receptive Stage" when learner is taking in the target language
- Learner may spend time learning vocabulary
- The length of this phase varies according to each individual learner and can last several hours or several months

Early Production
- Learner begins to try speaking by using words and short phrases, even though they may not be grammatically correct
- The biggest focus is still on listening and absorbing the new language
- Can last approximately six months

Speech Emergence or Production
- By this stage, learners have typically acquired a few thousand words
- Words/sentences become longer, but learner still relies heavily on context clues and familiar topics
- Learners are starting to develop greater comprehension
- Learners will begin reading and writing in their new language

Intermediate Fluency
- Learners begin to communicate in more complex sentences both in speaking and in writing
- Learners begin thinking in their new language which results in further proficiency gains

Advanced Fluency
- Learners can communicate fluently and adjust to new contexts when exposed to new academic information
- Learners require ongoing opportunities to further improve their accuracy and to maintain their fluency

Adapted from Ferlazzo & Hull Sypnieski (2022)

Organizing Programming

Characteristics of Learners by Level of English Language Proficiency

English language learners require different organizational structures and instructional supports based on their English language proficiency levels. Understanding the characteristics of English language learners at each level of English language proficiency helps school staff make decisions about what organizational options are most appropriate. The following chart shows some of the key characteristics of English language learners working at each of the five levels of English language proficiency as described in the Alberta K–12 ESL Proficiency Benchmarks.

Level 1 Beginning	Level 2 Developing	Level 3 Expanding	Level 4 Bridging	Level 5 Extending
• New to English • Little or no exposure to English as a foreign language classes • Usually literate in first language • May have previously been a student who required English language and literacy development	• Beginner with some prior English instruction • Has limited English proficiency • Usually has had previous schooling • Age-appropriate literacy in first language	• May have studied English in home country or had some schooling in Canada • May have been in Canada for some time with academic language gaps • Continue to require significant scaffolds, such as realia and visuals/graphic organizers to access grade level content	• Listening and speaking skills approaching English speakers in conversational English; however, academic oral proficiency is developing in specificity and complexity • Reading and writing skills at grade with scaffolding, direct instruction, and extra time	• May have studied English for several years (international or Canadian schools) • May appear fluent in oral language or may be less fluent orally and more competent in reading and/or writing • Requires support and instruction to understand literature and cultural references, word choices and sophisticated grammatical structures

For elementary, middle, and high school examples of effective organization and practices for English language learners see Organizing for Instruction.

A Quick Tour of EAL Best Practices

DO...	
MODEL for students what they are expected to do or produce, especially for new activities or skills, by explaining and demonstrating the learning actions, sharing your thinking processes aloud, and showing samples of good teacher and student work. Effective modelling should make the expectations of a task clear and remain available for student access throughout the activity or task.	**REGULARLY CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING**. After an explanation or a lesson, a teacher might say, "Please put thumbs up, thumbs down, or sideways to let me know if this is clear and it's perfectly fine if you don't understand or are unsure – I just need to know." Regular checks for understanding encourage students to become increasingly aware of monitoring their own understanding which can serve as a model for good study skills.
SPEAK CLEARLY AND SLOWLY and provide students with enough time to formulate their responses whether in speaking or writing. **PROVIDING 5 SECONDS OF WAIT TIME** provides all students with an opportunity to think and process while increasing student participation, improving the quality of student responses, and developing learning while boosting self-efficacy.	**ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO USE THEIR HOME LANGUAGE** to support learning in your classroom. Make sure to have the appropriate bilingual dictionaries in your classroom and allow students to access technology to use for translation.
USE VISUALS (pictures), sketches, gestures, intonation, and other non-verbal cues to make language and content more accessible.	**PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS** to help them organize their learning, make connections between new and prior knowledge, support demanding cognitive and linguistic tasks, and to promote active learning and engagement. Expose students to a variety of graphic organizers and have them reflect on which are most effective for their learning and why. Encourage them to create their own.
GIVE BOTH VERBAL AND WRITTEN/PICTORAL INSTRUCTIONS. This can help all learners.	**REMEMBER THE ASSETS EAL STUDENTS BRING WITH THEM TO SCHOOL AND TO THE COMMUNITY**. The presence of immigrant students in a school has been shown to increase achievement for all learners.

Adapted from Ferlazzo & Hull Sypnieski (2022)

Key considerations for programming and instruction are found in these essential resources:

- Understanding the Acquisition of English as an Additional Language
- Encouraging the Use of Home Languages

Remember: Language acquisition typically follows a pattern:

| Partial Understanding (Receptive) | Full Understanding (Receptive) | Independent Generation of Sentences and Ideas (Productive) |

Be patient. Even under ideal circumstances, language acquisition takes time and students will often progress through a "silent period" or receptive-only phase where learners are absorbing the language (Arnet & Bourgoin, 2018).

Coding, Tracking, and Reporting

Alberta Education EAL Program Coding:

301: Foreign-born students whose first language is not English **_and_** require English language supports.

302: Visiting students (ex. International Students) whose first language is not English **_and_** require English language supports.

303: Canadian-born students whose first language is not English **_and_** require English language supports. This may include First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Hutterite, or Mennonite students.

- **All** students with an EAL code must have an accompanying up-to-date ESL Proficiency Benchmark in Dossier.

- ESL Proficiency Benchmarks are working documents that are updated throughout the school year to inform teaching practice and provide direction in learning.

- As with any learner, student progress must be measured against curricular objectives.

Additional Information:

- Changes to the Alberta Education funding process for EAL codes **require that up-to-date benchmark documentation is in place annually by September 29**.

- Funding is provided for foreign-born and Canadian-born students for up to five (5) years. Funding does not apply to visiting students (302) however, ESL Proficiency Benchmarks must be completed to provide effective programming and as necessary, support accommodations on provincial exams.

- If an EAL code is not accompanied by an ESL Proficiency Benchmark by September 29, funding from Alberta Education is in jeopardy.

- Kindergarten students are **not** to be coded and ESL Proficiency Benchmarks cannot be created for them in Dossier. Please note that this also applies to any Kindergarten students who arrive with an EAL code from a pre-school program.

- Kindergarten teachers should maintain their own documentation around EAL student learning that can then be shared with students' Grade 1 teachers, when they will be coded if meeting the requirements.

- Students in French Immersion (FI) programs are not coded until Grade 3, when English as an additional language learning is supported. Schools are responsible for tracking and coding when a student enters Grade 3. Do not "place hold" EAL students in Grades 1 and 2 FI programming with an EAL code in Dossier.

- If a student has exhausted five years of funding but still requires English as an additional language support, leave the appropriate coding in PowerSchool AND maintain the use of ESL Proficiency Benchmarks to inform next steps in instruction.

Removal of an EAL Code

- Coding can be removed if a student has maintained benchmark Level 5 achievement on all four strands of the ESL Proficiency Benchmark for TWO consecutive years.

- Removal of an EAL code must be discussed with your school team and approved by school administrators. If it is determined that the EAL code should be removed for a student, the school-based team can remove the EAL code. Please contact a Learning Specialist if you require further consultation.

- For Grades 1-12, obtaining parent permission to remove EAL coding is not required, although communication with the family about code removal is recommended.

School-Based EAL Coordinator

Every RVS school has a School-Based EAL Coordinator teacher identified by each school's administrative team. The School-Based EAL Coordinator must:

- Ensure they have administrator access in PowerSchool. This can be granted by your school administration team.

- Create benchmarks annually in Dossier for newly-arrived students – see this instructional video created by the PowerSchool team for School-Based EAL Coordinators. It highlights how to "create" benchmarks in Dossier for new EAL students in your school.

- Assign or unassign teachers responsible for completing the ESL Proficiency Benchmarks in Dossier.

- Rollover approved June benchmarks in Dossier by September 29.

- Ensure up-to-date benchmarks are in Dossier by September 29 for any newly enrolled students, Grade 1 students, Grade 3 French Immersion (FI) students, and students in grades 4, 7 and 10.

- Give final approval of the ESL Proficiency Benchmarks annually in Dossier by June 30.

- Attend professional learning opportunities.

- Disseminate district level EAL information to school staff.

EAL Timelines Based on Alberta Education's Funding Model:

Assessment Schedule	
School-Based EAL Coordinators are confirmed by school principals.	September 15
All ESL Proficiency Benchmarks that were approved in June must be rolled over in Dossier, where applicable, by the School Based EAL Coordinator. As needed, where a roll over is not possible, an up-to-date ESL Proficiency Benchmark must be completed in Dossier by teachers for these students: • Students who are new to RVS • All Grade 1 students • Grade 3 French Immersion students • Students whose ESL Proficiency Benchmarks were not approved in June • Students who are changing grade-level divisions (Grades 4, 7, 10).	September 29
ESL Proficiency Benchmarks ("Sep-Jan" in Dossier) are open to be used by classroom teachers to inform their instruction and be reviewed and/or updated by January 29. Benchmarks MUST be updated for Grade 9, 11, 12 students to comply with Alberta Education	October 1 – January 29
ESL Proficiency Benchmarks are reviewed and approved in Dossier by the School-Based **EAL Coordinator.**	January 31
Teachers work through their "Feb-Jun" ESL Proficiency Benchmarks in Dossier, ensuring any updates are completed by June 15 (or earlier or later, as directed by the EAL Coordinator) so that they can be reviewed and finalized by the School Based EAL Coordinator in June.	February 1 – June 15
All "Feb-Jun" ESL Proficiency Benchmarks must be reviewed and "Final Summary" approved by the School-Based EAL Coordinator so that they can be pushed to PASI/Alberta Education by the PS team. June approval is a prerequisite to the rollover process that takes place the following school year to meet the September 29 deadline for Alberta Education funding. *******"Feb-Jun" ESL Proficiency Benchmarks that are not "Final Summary" approved cannot be rolled over and RVS will NOT receive funding for these students.*	June 30

Rocky View Schools How-to Videos:
• ESL Benchmarks in Dossier for ELL COORDINATORS
• ESL Benchmarks in Dossier for TEACHERS

Resources

For Schools

- Alberta Education (2014) What Administrators Need to Know About English Language Learners
- Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia (2017). Supporting English Language Learners
- Alberta Teacher's Association Working with Immigrant Students and Families
- Arnett, K., & Bourgoin, B. (2017). Access for Success: Making Inclusion Work for Language Learners (1st Ed.). Pearson Canada.
- Calgary Board of Education Teaching Refugees with Limited Formal Schooling
- Calgary Regional Consortia. PD PLAYLISTS of Resources for Teachers of English Language Learners
- Ferlazzo, L., & Hull Sypnieski, K. (2022). The ESL/ELL Teacher's Survival Guide: Ready-to-Use Strategies, Tools, Activities for Teaching All Levels (2nd Ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Ferlazzo, L., & Hull Sypnieski, K. (2018). The ELL Teacher's Toolbox: Hundreds of Practical Ideas to Support Your Students. Jossey-Bass.
- Learn Alberta Supporting English Language Learners
- Rocky View Immigrant Services (RVIS) is a non-profit organization and our district's designated Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) provider offering settlement and integration services to all immigrants and refugees in Rocky View County. It is part of the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS). EAL coordinators can contact their school's designated settlement worker to collaborate in supporting students.
- Rojas, V.P. (2007). Strategies for Success with English Language Learners. ASCD.

For Families

- Action for Healthy Communities (AHC) is a newcomer-serving organization funded through the Government of Canada's Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Department (IRCC). All their services are free of charge.
- Alberta Health Services Mental Health Helpline (translation available for parents and students)
- Alberta Health Services Help in Tough Times (overarching look at all mental health resources available to support the mental health of evacuees, refugees, immigrants as well as for teachers and school staff)
- Government of Alberta. Support for Ukrainians (provincial services available to Ukrainian evacuees, including information on education in Alberta translated into Ukrainian)
- Rocky View Immigrant Services (RVIS) is a non-profit organization and our district's designated Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) provider offering settlement and integration services to all immigrants and refugees in Rocky View County. It is part of the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS).

Appendix

Family Conference Questionnaire