How Can a School Leadership Team Meet the Needs of ELLs?

To ensure the development and maintenance of an effective school environment for ELLs, the leadership team should review the quality of the learning environment for the school as a whole and within individual classrooms. The goal of this review process is to ensure that teaching and learning activities are well-structured and culturally and linguistically engaging and allow students to be active (rather than passive) participants in their acquisition of the English language and academic content (Gay, 2000). In addition, relative to RTI, the leadership team should review screening and progress monitoring data for ELLs, along with any resulting instructional modifications, to ensure that the instructional supports used across the RTI tiers are culturally and linguistically appropriate and are leading to improved student outcomes (NCRTI, 2010). Ortiz and colleagues (2009) recommend that schools conduct the following practices:

- Accommodate instruction to best reflect the communication styles of students
- Incorporate and value the use of diverse community practices in the curriculum
- Adapt instruction to accommodate the acculturation needs of students
- Develop linguistic competence through functional and purposeful dialogue in the Classroom
- Connect students’ prior experiences with current skills being taught (i.e., experiential background)
- Contextualize learning by reflecting and placing value on students’ native cultural values, norms, and languages when implementing the curriculum

Who Should Be on the School Leadership Team?

Within the leadership team, a diverse representation of members is important. Team members should acknowledge and utilize differences in expertise so that everyone can contribute toward the development of a culturally responsive learning environment. Team members should also operate on the premise of mutual accountability for achieving goals that have been established for student performance (Richards, Artiles, Klinger, & Brown, 2005).

An effective leadership team includes several individuals who have an impact on the ways that ELLs learn and represents a collective effort across school stakeholders.

**School principals** are responsible for engaging school personnel, parents, and the community in adopting a common philosophy and approach to culturally and
linguistically responsive instruction. Principals ensure the proper implementation of RTI and support teachers and personnel for the program’s success.

**Bilingual education and ESL teachers** can support the use of native languages in teaching the school curriculum and provide rigorous, systematic English language development (ELD) programs so students can improve their English proficiency. Bilingual education and ESL teachers also help general and special education teachers successfully integrate ELLs into their classrooms and adapt instruction.

**General education teachers** integrate ELLs into their classrooms. They support the development of students’ English language and literacy skills. General education teachers also have a primary responsibility to meet the language needs of students who:

- Do not receive bilingual education/ESL services because they are not considered ELLs but may require some language support. This includes students who speak only English, although English is not the native language of their parents and as a result the students have limited opportunities to hear and use standard English before school.
- Do not qualify for ESL programs but do not have native-like English skills.

**Skill and content specialists** support the development of ELLs’ English conversational and academic language skills. They also teach and support English literacy and content area instruction. Skill and content specialists support general education teachers as they differentiate instruction to meet the needs of students. They also provide more intensive interventions for ELLs who are struggling academically.

**Special education teachers** can ideally provide instruction that addresses both language- and disability-related needs for ELL students who are found eligible for special education. They support:

- Native language development
- English as a second language acquisition
- Native and/or English literacy development
- Content area instruction

Special education teachers also consult with bilingual education, ESL, and general education teachers so that the disability-related needs of students are addressed in every setting (Ortiz et al., 2009).

**Parents** provide experiences upon which to build language acquisition and ensure that instruction is culturally responsive. To support their children’s acquisition of language and literacy, parents should talk to their children in both their native language and English when possible, read with their children, and assist with homework.
What Does Success Look Like for the School Leadership Team?

As the team moves forward, it is also important to determine how well the team is doing on three levels (Kovaleski, 2002):

1. Individual student outcomes, including overall student achievement and the results of specific interventions
2. Schoolwide indicators of effectiveness, including impact on teacher practices, involvement of parents and families, and impact on special education placements
3. Stakeholder satisfaction with the team, including that of teachers, parents, and students

While the assessment of team success depends greatly on the individual characteristics of the school and team, Bickel and colleagues (1999) share several factors that can help to contribute to the success of any leadership team:

- Obtain the support and involvement of administrators at the school and district levels
- Use a variety of student assessments (e.g., portfolios, multiple choice tests, presentations, etc.) to measure student progress
- Use progress monitoring data to inform instructional interventions
- Build a culturally and linguistically diverse leadership team
- Ensure highly skilled instructional support (e.g., qualified bilingual education teachers)
- Maintain ongoing collaboration between general, bilingual, and special education teachers
- Implement a problem-solving process that is built on trust and shared responsibility