

Leading with Learning: Systematically Transforming Teaching for English Learners

What is Leading with Learning?

Leading with Learning is a system for ensuring that culturally and linguistically diverse learners experience effective teaching and learning and attain high academic achievement. The system focuses intensively on the learning needs of students who are learning English as an additional language, or English learners (EL students). The system includes students, teachers, instructional coaches, principals and other site leadership, and district leaders in preschool, elementary school, and middle school. Parents and families are engaged in their children’s learning through the Teachers’ Course activities. The name “Leading with Learning” intentionally highlights learning as the focus of the system, which aims to improve students’ daily learning experiences in order to improve academic outcomes. In addition, Leading with Learning creates a culture of continuous and collaborative learning so that the adults at all levels of the system continuously grow and improve as professionals.

All Leading with Learning work is grounded in California’s English Language Arts/English Language Development (CA ELA/ELD) Framework for K–12 Public Schools, which guides teachers and school and district leaders in their implementation of two sets of world-class standards: California’s Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for ELA/Literacy, and the California ELD Standards. Both sets of standards drive all course content and are present in all sessions. In addition, the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), CCSS for Mathematics, and other content standards are leveraged to ensure a robust, integrated, and interdisciplinary curriculum for all students.

Leading with Learning was originally funded by a United States Department of Education Investing in Innovation (i3) grant, with support from private sector funding partners: The Ford Family Foundation, The California Endowment, The Sierra Health Foundation, The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and Amazon. The founding California partner districts were Fresno Unified School District and Sacramento City Unified School District, and now additional school districts in California and in other states are joining the Leading with Learning community.

What is distinctive about the Leading with Learning Approach?

Leading with Learning includes interrelated and aligned courses for teachers, instructional coaches, principals, district facilitators, and district leadership teams. The approach promotes capacity building and shared leadership in a culture of trust and learning. District staff collaborate with WestEd experts to ensure the relevancy of course activities for participants and alignment with the district’s vision and goals. District leaders co-facilitate the Principals’ Course and district leadership team meetings to ensure authentic implementation and to prepare for scaling and sustainability. Instructional coaches serve as co-facilitators of the Teachers’ Course and provide all follow-up coaching to teachers and thought-partnering support to principals. In this approach, instructional coaches are key levers of school improvement and essential to the system. This shared ownership among all members of the system is grounded in the following core tenets for professional learning:

- **Focus on Social Justice and Fairness**
 - Explicitly seek to recognize inequities and actively redress them.
 - Use culturally sustaining materials, techniques, and topics.
 - Embrace social and emotional learning principles (positive learning environments, student agency, authentic connections, compassion, empathy, self-regulation.)
- **Promote Continuous Learning and Growth**
 - Ensure that professional learning for adults mirrors effective classroom practices (discussion-based, collaborative, inquiry-driven, relevant and meaningful, integrated.)
 - Invest in people (high expectations require high support.)
 - Use research and evidence-based practices to drive course content.
 - Encourage risk-taking and reflection (and welcome missteps and approximations.)
- **Focus on Students and Their Assets**
 - Use student-centered problem solving to inform planning.
 - Ensure that instructional shifts are inquiry-driven and based on evidence of student learning.
 - View students as having assets and resources to leverage and build upon (not as having deficits that must be “fixed”.)
- **Build Shared Leadership**
 - Recognize that trust and professionalism among the adults are key.
 - Respect teachers as agents of their own learning.
 - Consider all of the adults as sharing the responsibility for the students.

What are the goals of Leading with Learning?

The main goal is to ensure that all students experience academically rich, culturally sustaining, and positive teaching and learning daily in order to improve their academic, language, and literacy learning outcomes throughout the year. To accomplish this goal, all professional learning emphasizes the following **4 Daily Essential Practices**, which are intended ultimately to take place in all classrooms:

- **Positive, Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Teaching:** Students develop a sense of personal efficacy; maintain cultural identity and connections with their ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups and communities; build positive relationships; and develop an ethic of success that is compatible with cultural pride.
- **Collaborative Discussions, Reading, and Writing:** Students work together in intellectually rich and integrated learning around worthy and engaging inquiry questions, texts, and topics in ways that support their deep learning, ability to engage in extended academic discourse, and abundant and authentic writing.
- **Academic Language Development:** Students are immersed in a language rich environment and engage in interactive and discussion-based learning tasks about the language in complex texts, with a focus on understanding the complex texts better and making informed and deliberate choices about language when speaking and writing.
- **Scaffolding and Student Ownership:** Students develop autonomy and ownership of the learning process through scaffolding (planned and just-in-time) and formative assessment practices that are tailored to their individual needs.



What are the Courses like?

Leading with Learning is a three-year process, with the first two years consisting of intensive support from WestEd staff (co-facilitation of professional learning course sessions; partnership support for coaches, principals and district leaders). The third year of the partnership is focused on sustaining and scaling the work. All course materials are provided by Leading with Learning with some variation based on the local context. The courses focus on implementation of the **4 Daily Essential Practices** (described above) and include between-session Focused Application Tasks for participants to apply their learning. An outline of the five, interrelated Courses is provided below, and additional details can be found in each Course's syllabus.

- **Teachers' Course:** This Course consists of an intensive summer institute and then, during the school year, additional "seminar" sessions. Follow-up coaching is provided by district instructional coaches, who are in turn supported by WestEd staff. The goal of this Course is to support teachers to enact the **4 Daily Essential Practices** in a variety of ways. The course is differentiated by grade span (TK/PreK–grade 1, grades 2–3, grades 4–6) to ensure that the content is relevant for teachers and aligned to grade-level standards. Through the Course, teachers . . .
 - deepen their knowledge of California's ELA/ELD Framework and ELD Standards;
 - participate in model lessons featuring high-leverage pedagogical practices (Keystone Pedagogies);
 - collaboratively plan lessons to try out the Keystone Pedagogies, using the CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy, ELD Standards, and other resources, including their own instructional materials; and
 - engage in inquiry into practice with their peers through doing Focused Application Tasks and examining evidence of student learning.
- **Coaches' Course:** This Course consists of a summer kick-off session followed by face-to-face sessions and online sessions of professional learning communities throughout the school year. Coaches also fully participate in the Teachers' Course, either as participants or co-facilitators. Through the Coaches' Course, coaches . . .
 - deepen their knowledge about the pedagogical practices, research, and theoretical foundations addressed in the Teachers' Course;
 - collaboratively prepare to support teachers to plan for, implement, and reflect on the "Keystone Pedagogies" and the overarching **4 Daily Essential Practices**; and
 - engage in inquiry into practice with their peers through doing Focused Application Tasks and examining evidence of teacher learning.
- **Principals' Course:** This Course consists of several face-to-face sessions during the school year in which principals from the Leading with Learning schools convene in a peer-coaching format. Principals also fully participate in the Teachers' Course. Through the Principals' Course, principals . . .
 - deepen their knowledge and enhance their skills around leading their schools to implement the **4 Daily Essential Practices**;
 - plan to identify and set goals with their teachers, based on their particular school's context; and
 - engage in inquiry into practice with their peers through doing Focused Application Tasks and examining evidence of the school's progress toward identified goals.
- **District Facilitators' Course:** This Course consists of a summer institute to prepare for co-facilitation of all Courses and follow-up collegial coaching and support from WestEd co-facilitators throughout the year. This Course builds district capacity to scale and sustain the work over time since by the end of the three-year partnership, the instructional coaches are well-prepared to lead the professional learning in their districts.

-
- **District Leadership Teams' Course:** This Course consists of collaborative work sessions during the school year for cross-departmental district teams. Through this Course, team members . . .
 - learn about how the **4 Daily Essential Practices** are evolving in the schools;
 - create a plan for stronger cross-departmental collaboration and for sharing the responsibility of scaling and sustaining the work over time; and
 - examine and enhance existing systems for improving academic achievement and social and emotional learning for culturally and linguistically diverse students, with a particular focus on EL students.