



## REL Pacific Ask A REL Response

English Learners

May 2019

### Question:

**What are the best practices in high-functioning ESL (English as a Second Language) schools?**

### Response:

Following an established REL Pacific research protocol, we conducted a web-based search for resources related to effective practices for English learners and successful practices in ESL-focused schools (see Methods section for search terms and resource selection criteria). We focused our search in particular on studies in the Pacific and other indigenous contexts for greater relevancy to the Pacific region, however we did include studies with more generalizable findings. Because this request came from those with an interest in charter schools, we also prioritized research relevant to charter schools.

References are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance. Descriptions of the resources are quoted directly from the publication abstracts. We have not evaluated the quality of references and the resources provided in this response. We offer them only for your reference. Also, our search included the most commonly used research resources, but they are not comprehensive and other relevant references and resources may exist.

### Research References

Candal, C. S. (2015). *Massachusetts charter public schools: Best practices serving English language learners. White Paper No. 140*. Boston, MA: Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED565728>.

*From the ERIC abstract:* “In recent years many charter public schools in Massachusetts have increased the number of English language learners (ELLs) that they enroll. A 2010 amendment to the charter school law has made it easier for charter schools to recruit English language learners. The success that many charter schools have had with this

subset of students defies critics who claim that charter schools "cream" students, attracting and retaining only those who are "easiest to teach." Case studies of high-achieving charter schools with large and sometimes culturally and linguistically diverse populations of English language learners reveal common best practices. These practices include but are not limited to: individually tailored curricula that emphasize inclusive teaching practices; intentional and continuous use of high-quality formative assessments; language-enriched learning environments; recruitment and retention of teachers with knowledge of the communities that the school serves; and efforts to engage parents and community that are attuned to relevant cultural and linguistic contexts. The following report highlights three high-performing charter schools, detailing the common best practices that they continue to use and refine and highlighting the subtle but important ways each school caters to its specific student population. The case studies make clear that the autonomies that these schools enjoy because of their charter status allow them to be nimble in serving a changing student population. The same autonomies also enable these schools to design and refine approaches to serving English language learners that enhance student learning and achievement.”

Francis, D., Rivera, M., Lesaux, N., Kieffer, M., & Rivera, H. (2006). *Practical guidelines for the education of English language learners: Research-based recommendations for instruction and academic interventions*. (Under cooperative agreement grant S283B050034 for U.S. Department of Education). Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research Corporation, Center on Instruction. Retrieved from <http://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/ELL1-Interventions.pdf>.

*From the abstract:* “This document provides evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, administrators, and teachers in K-12 settings who seek to make informed decisions about instruction and academic interventions for ELLs. The domains of focus include reading and mathematics, and the recommendations apply to both a class-wide instructional format and individualized, targeted interventions, depending on the population and the goals of the instruction.”

Garcia, P. & Morales, P.Z. (2016). Exploring quality programs for English language learners in charter schools: A framework to guide future research. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 24(53), 1-25. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1100172>.

*From the abstract:* “Although there has been a great deal of debate about the effectiveness of charter schools in the research literature, there has been surprisingly little attention paid to English language learners (ELLs) in charter schools. Moreover, the charter school research has predominantly focused on whether or not charter schools are effective rather than "how" or "why" high-performing charter schools work, particularly for ELLs. We contend that researchers must expand their focus beyond access and achievement and begin to grapple with questions related to the quality of programs for

ELLs in charter schools. To meet an emerging need in the field, we synthesize several strands of existing research--related to charter schools, school improvement, and ELLs in traditional public schools--to propose a five-component framework that describes essential elements of quality programs for ELLs in charter schools. We conclude with a discussion of implications of our framework for research, policy, and practice.”

Guler, N. (Ed.) 2018. *Optimizing elementary education for English language learners. Advances in early childhood and K–12 education*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED589796>.

*From the abstract:* “Teaching English language learners has long presented challenges for teachers tasked with bringing these students to a level of language comprehension comparable to that of native speakers. These challenges and issues can lead to difficulty comprehending core academic topics for those learning the English language. "Optimizing Elementary Education for English Language Learners" is a critical scholarly publication that explores the importance of English as a Second Language (ESL) education as well as the challenges that can arise in striving for effective and engaging learning environments for the students involved. Featuring a broad scope of topics, such as effective lesson plans, teacher education and preparation, and the education achievement gap, this book is geared toward academicians, practitioners, and researchers seeking current research on effective teaching strategies for teachers of English language learners. This book contains the following chapters: (1) Misconceptions About ELLs: Culturally Responsive Practices for General Education Teachers (Lara Christoun and Jun Wang); (2) The Reality of Teaching Young ELLs in a Pull-Out Program: Setting Expectations and Overcoming Misconceptions (Tatiana I. Sildus, Natalie Vanderbeck, and Michelle Broxterman); (3) Striving Toward Biliteracy in Mainstream, English as a Second Language, and Bilingual Classrooms (Nermin Vehabovic and Casey Medlock Paul); (4) Young Learners: Motivation and Second Language Acquisition (Joanna Rodiki Petrides); (5) Elementary English Language Learners: Misconceptions About Second Language Learning and Teaching Practices (Khanh Nguyen Bui and Isabel L. Balsamo); (6) Reaching Rigor for English Learners Through Responsive Interactions of Care (Melissa A. Holmes, Shabina K. Kavimandan, and Socorro G. Herrera); (7) Using Brain-Based Instruction to Optimize Early Childhood English Language Education (Walaa M. El-Henawy); (8) Teaching Mathematics to Elementary ELL Students (Ozgul Kartal, Nilufer Guler, and Dincer Guler); (9) Opportunities for Engaging Young English Language Learners Through Technology Use (Joy Egbert and Reima Abobaker); (10) Strategies for Working With Image-Text Relations in Picturebooks (Luciana C. de Oliveira, Sharon L. Smith, Loren Jones, and Carolina Rossato de Almeida); (11) Teaching Reading to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Elementary Students (Nilufer Guler and Wendy Johnson Donnell); (12) Building Academic Language Through Innovation: Teaching With a Maker's Mind (Brandy C. Judkins and Zoe Falls); (13)

Teaching ELL Students in the Elementary Grades: Teaching ELL Students With Disabilities (Sue Ellen McCalley); (14) Dimensions of Success Integrating the C3 Framework and ESL Instruction: In Elementary Social Studies Classrooms (Katherine Barko-Alva and Stephen S. Masyada); and (15) Lost in Comprehension: Addressing English Language Learners' Reading Needs in the Elementary Classroom (Casey Medlock Paul and Nermin Vehabovic). (Individual chapters contain references.)”

Hall, C., Roberts, G.J., Cho, E., McCullery, L.V., Carroll, M., & Vaughn, S. (2017). Reading instruction for English learners in the middle grades: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 29(4), 763-794. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1159847>.

*From the abstract:* “This meta-analysis synthesizes the last two decades of experimental and quasi-experimental research on reading instruction across academic contexts (e.g., social studies, science, mathematics, English language arts) for English learners (ELs) in grades 4 through 8, to determine (a) the overall effectiveness of reading instruction for upper elementary and middle school students who are ELs and (b) how the magnitude of the effect varies based on student, instructional, and study characteristics. The analysis included a total of 11 studies with 46 individual effect sizes and yielded a mean effect size of  $g = 0.35$  across all (i.e., standardized and unstandardized) reading measures,  $g = 0.01$  across standardized reading measures, and  $g = 0.43$  across unstandardized reading measures. For all reading, unstandardized reading, all vocabulary, and unstandardized vocabulary measures, results suggest that higher quality studies tended to have smaller effects, and these effects were even more evident for unstandardized measures (i.e., one unit increase in study quality was associated with decreased effects:  $g = 0.21$ ,  $g = 0.30$ ,  $g = 0.24$ ,  $g = 0.30$ , respectively). For all comprehension measures, effects were larger for instruction that included both vocabulary and comprehension ( $g = 0.39$ ) than for instruction that focused on vocabulary alone ( $g = 0.08$ ). Results suggest the benefit of developing and refining high-impact approaches to reading instruction for ELs that can be delivered across content areas and grades.”

Kouritzin, S.G. (2004). Programs, plans, and practices in schools with reputations for ESL student success. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 60(4), 481-499. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ784174>.

*From the abstract:* “This article reports on a year-long comparative case study of four secondary schools in low-incidence areas (less than 6% ESL) that have a reputation for success in the educational attainment of ESL students. Multiple data collection strategies revealed that, in low-incidence areas, school-wide programs and attitudes more than specific pedagogical practices seemed to be correlated with student success. This article describes school and district programs and practices, within the categories of administrative support, community support, and school support. The implications of this research are that further understanding of educating ESL students in low-incidence as

opposed to high-incidence areas is needed, and that the TESL profession should take a leading role in making connections with educational administration programs, thus ensuring that future administrators are able to plan for success.”

*Note: REL Pacific was unable to locate a free link to the full-text version of this resource. Although REL Pacific tries to provide publicly available resources whenever possible, this resource may be of sufficient interest to the reader to warrant finding it through university or public library systems.*

Martínez, R. S., Harris, B., and McClain, M. B. (2014). Practices that promote English reading for English learners (ELs). *Journal of Educational & Psychological Consultation*, 24(2),128-148. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1030136>.

*From the abstract:* “Schools are becoming increasingly diversified; however, training and professional development related to working with English language learners (ELs), especially in the area of English reading, is limited. In this article, we identify three "Big Ideas" of effective and collaborative practices that promote English reading achievement for EL students: (a) foster academic English at all stages of second-language acquisition by explicitly teaching vocabulary, emphasizing cross-linguistic transfer strategies, and supporting ongoing oral language development; (b) adopt a schoolwide collaborative approach to conduct frequent formative reading assessments and use the data to drive instruction by providing accommodations that promote English reading; and (c) implement a variety of grouping strategies to deliver reading instruction within a welcoming and sensitive learning climate. In addition, we discuss how school professionals may proactively instruct ELs and collaborate within a multidisciplinary framework to improve the English reading ability of students who are simultaneously learning the English language.”

### **Additional Organizations to Consult**

Center for Applied Linguistics: <http://www.cal.org>

*From the website:* “The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) is a non-profit organization founded in 1959. Headquartered in Washington DC, CAL has earned an international reputation for its contributions to the fields of bilingual and dual language education, English as a second language, world languages education, language policy, assessment, immigrant and refugee integration, literacy, dialect studies, and the education of linguistically and culturally diverse adults and children. CAL's mission is to promote language learning and cultural understanding by serving as a trusted source for research, resources, and policy analysis. Through its work, CAL seeks solutions to issues involving language and culture as they relate to access and equity in education and society around the globe.”

What Works Clearinghouse: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

*From the website:* “The What Works Clearinghouse is an investment of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) within the U.S. Department of Education that was established in 2002. The work of the WWC is managed by a team of staff at IES and conducted under a set of contracts held by several leading firms with expertise in education, research methodology, and the dissemination of education research. Follow the links to find more information about the key staff from American Institutes for Research, Mathematica Policy Research, Abt Associates, and Development Services Group, Inc who contribute to the WWC investment.”

## **Methods**

### **Keywords and Search Strings**

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- “best practices” and “ESL schools”
- “bilingual school” and English
- “English learners” and “Meta-analysis”

### **Searched Databases and Resources**

We searched ERIC, a free online library of over 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences, for relevant resources. Additionally, we searched the academic database Google Scholar.

### **Reference Search and Selection Criteria**

REL Pacific searched ERIC and other academic journal databases for studies that were published in English-language peer-reviewed research journals within the last 20 years. REL Pacific prioritized documents that are accessible online and publicly available, and prioritized references that provide practical information based on peer-reviewed research for the teachers and leaders who requested this Ask A REL. The methodological priorities/considerations given in the review and selection of the references were, in order of priority:

- Study types – randomized control trials, quasi experiments, surveys, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews;
- Target population, sample size, study duration;
- Limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by educational stakeholders in the Pacific Region (American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Hawai’i, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL Pacific) at McREL International. This memorandum was prepared by REL Pacific under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-17-C-0010, administered by McREL International. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government