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# EL Instruction in Practice: Family Life Academy Charter School



Family Life Academy Charter Schools (FLACS) is a network of four charter school campuses in the South Bronx that will serve 1,560 in grades K-8 in 2020–2021. Its first school was founded in 2001. Across the network, 14% of students are current ELs. Nine percent of students were once English learners (ELs) but have become proficient in English over their time enrolled.

FLACS seeks to create the conditions for self-empowerment for all its K-8 students to achieve high academic standards, help them take responsibility for their own learning, and encourage them to explore and affirm human values. Like a family – and in collaboration with each family – the school creates an orderly, nurturing, and dynamic environment where learning is engaging, meaningful, and joyful. All members of the school community (students, parents, and teachers) develop the knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm to continue learning throughout their lives, expand their understanding of what is possible for themselves and their world, and lead productive and satisfying lives.

### Please share details about your EL instruction program.

FLACS uses a sheltered English immersion model of its own design for learning English as a New Language (ENL). In a sheltered English immersion model, content and language instruction are integrated. The teacher provides scaffolds through instructional techniques and learning activities that allow students at all English proficiency levels, including English native speakers, to access the same level of content, while also developing ELs' proficiency in English. FLACS has identified a set of research-based practices that all teachers use in supporting ELs in learning both English and content material in English. The classroom teacher and the English as a New Language (ENL) teacher share responsibility for providing language arts and content-area instruction using ENL instructional strategies.

At FLACS, instruction is delivered to ELs in three ways:

- 1. Standalone/Pull Out:** Some instruction occurs in a standalone/pull-out class, in which students receive English language development instruction taught by a NYS-certified teacher of ENL.
- 2. Integrated/Co-Teaching/Push In:** Some content-area classes are taught using a push-in/co-teaching model with a classroom teacher and NYS-certified ENL teacher.

Students receive core content area and English language development instruction with appropriate EL instructional supports.

- 3. Integrated in All Classroom Instruction:** During the rest of the academic day, the classroom teacher provides instruction that includes explicit scaffolds to support ENL students.

The approach was borne out of a desire to ensure equitable outcomes for all students. Several of our network and school leaders are themselves former ELs—this mission is a deeply personal one for the schools. To do this, each teacher needs to be well-versed in research-based strategies to support ELs so that all instruction helps scaffold students' ability to access the same content and skills as their English proficient peers. This sheltered approach also ensures that all teachers have a repertoire of skills that not only benefit ELs but are good instructional practices for any student who needs support in language acquisition.

## What are your keys to success in the education of EL students? What lessons have you learned to pass along to your peers?

Aside from ensuring that every teacher sees themselves as an ENL teacher, the following list shares some of the key instructional practices used at FLACS:

- **Setting Content and Language Objectives.** Teachers create clearly defined content and language objectives for each lesson, unit, and subject.
- **Nonlinguistic Representations Supplementary Materials.** Support for ELs includes nonlinguistic representations that will help promote comprehension such as: hands-on manipulatives, pictures, illustrations, photos, multimedia, and simulations.
- **Adaptation of Content.** Teachers adapt the text, assignment, or supports so students can access the content without losing rigor.
- **Meaningful Activities.** Teachers prepare meaningful activities that integrate content with language practice opportunities to read, write, speak, and/or listen.
- **Drawing Connections Between What Students Know and New Information.** Building background knowledge helps students make connections between prior knowledge and what they are about to learn.
- **Explicit Vocabulary Instruction Teachers.** Explicitly pre-teach and/or present key vocabulary to students prior to beginning study of new content.
- **Comprehensible Input.** Teachers are aware of their own speech when teaching new concepts to EL students.
- **Summarizing and Note Taking.** Students can benefit from learning strategies for summarizing, using summary frames, and engaging peers in reciprocal teaching.
- **Grouping and Cooperative Learning.** Working in groups and using cooperative learning helps students to learn the English language.
- **Wait Time After Asking a Question.** It takes time for ELs, and other students, to process and understand what is being asked and to formulate a response.
- **Providing Feedback.** Share immediate and clear feedback about student work that is grounded in the purpose and priorities of the assignment.