ESL Department

Al Orecchio
Assistant Superintendent of Pupil Services and Personalized Learning
aorecchi@weehawkenschools.net

Xiomara Nygren- Coordinator
Weehawken High School
xnygren@weehawkenschools.net

Natalie Ventrone
Theodore Roosevelt School
nventron@weehawkenschools.net

Elvira Chernov
Daniel Webster School
echernov@weehawkenschools.net
Program Overview

Placements
● If students are new to the country, they will be evaluated and placed in the appropriate class.
● If students are presently enrolled in an ESL program and need continued instruction, they will be placed in the appropriate class.

Mastery of the English language can take on average 3 to 5 years.

Mastery of Academic Language can take on average 5-8 years. (Cummins 2006)

Instruction for ELLs
Weehawken has a High Intensity ESL Pull-out Program.

The students are grouped into language ability, Newcomers/Beginners and Intermediates/ Advanced.

● The newcomers/beginners are given interactive instructions in rich language incorporating listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
● The intermediates are provided opportunities in Language Arts and content areas such as Science, Social Studies, Math, and Reading.

Testing & Exiting
Testing: The English Language Learners, ELLs, are required to take the state’s ESL test, ACCESS for ELLs, which usually takes place in the spring. In addition, they are required to take the PARCC test.

Exiting: We have a multiple-criteria checklist.

● Students need a score of 4.5 on the ACCESS; their results come in the summer.
● Obtain a passing grade in their regular classes.
● The ESL and classroom teachers meet to discuss the student’s progress.

New Initiatives for ESL

● National Geographic ESL series for the district
● Increased use of technology (i-Pads, SMARTBoard)
● Curriculum Mapping
Every region of our country is experiencing a shift in racial and ethnic composition and this shift is projected to continue over the next few decades. Educators will have to be prepared to meet the needs of the increasing diversity of students to prepare all children to become productive members of our country. It is especially crucial to understand the particular needs of students who come from homes where English is not the dominant language. To provide ELLs with rigorous, culturally responsive instruction, a strong Response to Intervention (RTI) Tier 2 model must be in place. This model holds significant promise for better serving English Language Learners (ELLs) who are at-risk for academic difficulties.

Tier 1 is the instructional core that is intended to incorporate high quality evidence-based instruction for all students. This includes instruction that has been shown to be effective for ELLs, and differentiation to meet students’ diverse needs. Instruction for ELLs in English language development is provided at the Tier 1 instructional level. Students move into Tier 2 if they demonstrate a need for more targeted and intensive academic support. This extra support can occur in the classroom, but also in separate settings with instruction focused on specific learning targets. Tier 2 instruction should also be tailored to meet ELLs’ language needs and should be incorporated into research-based intervention strategies.

How Is Tier 2 Intervention Effectively Implemented for ELLs?

Provide intensive reading interventions to ELLs demonstrating low reading skills immediately when needed. These interventions can be effectively implemented as early as 1st grade, as well as for more mature readers with reading difficulties.

Ensure that interventions are sufficiently intense by retaining small groups (3–6 students) who are provided intervention for a minimum of 30 minutes each day.

When students receiving literacy instruction in English demonstrate weak reading skills or have evident reading difficulties, do not wait for English oral language to improve before providing reading interventions. Use appropriate practices for building oracy skills and vocabulary development as well as reading skills.
ACCESS for ELLs

The WIDA Consortium assessment is entitled Assessing Communication and Comprehension in English State to State for English Language Learners (ACCESS for ELLs). Therefore, the New Jersey Department of Education uses ACCESS for ELLs as the statewide assessment instrument for the required annual assessment of English language proficiency. ACCESS for ELLs is a standards-based, criterion-referenced English language proficiency test designed to measure ELLs’ social and academic proficiency in English. It assesses social and academic English as well as the language associated with language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies within the school context across the four language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Students taking this assessment must be assigned a Testing Tier in advance which is based upon each student’s language proficiency level, see

This test is a secured test and all instructional staff must practice strict adherence to the ACCESS for ELLs Procedures / Security measures. All ACCESS test administrators must sign the school’s ACCESS for ELLs Procedures / Security Plan, see plan template in the Resources section of this handbook. Results from this assessment will generate the Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs) to show, not only English language proficiency, but also academic language proficiency.

Information about the ACCESS test can be found at http://www.wida.us/assessment/access/index.aspx
ESL FAQ’s

What is ESL?

English as a Second Language is a specific curriculum that is sequenced in order of increasing linguistic complexity. The purpose of ESL is to provide targeted activities and practice with developmentally appropriate language forms and functions that will allow students to acquire the English language. Students practice language in all four domains (reading, writing, speaking and listening).

Is parent permission needed before screening for a Bilingual/ESL language assistance program?

Parent permission is not required for the Bilingual/ESL screening process.

When should ESL occur?

ESL is a mandatory curricular area for all English learners via federal and state law. ESL must be a part of the daily program for every English language learner.

Why do we need ESL?

English language learners need a specific developmental curriculum designed to develop their basic and academic language proficiency in English. Students who are not yet proficient in English need a specialized environment that meets their particular needs by allowing them to practice necessary skills to acquire the English language. ESL provides English language learners with such an environment.

How is ESL taught?

In order to provide appropriate English language instruction, the English language learner's current ESL level must be taken into account. All English language learners must receive daily ESL instruction targeted to their proficiency levels. The content of an ESL class is the English language. Students acquire the language by participating in meaningful academic activities and projects at a developmentally appropriate level.

Research shows that a second language is acquired in much the same way as the first. To facilitate the acquisition of English, ESL should be taught where the use of the language is authentic and the atmosphere is one of low anxiety. English instruction that is relevant to the student and is presented in a student-friendly environment promotes the acquisition of English. Tapping prior knowledge helps students connect the new language to familiar topics and helps create a low-stress environment, which encourages learners to take risks and experiment with language.

What about grammar?

Grammar is a part of all four domains in ESL, reading, speaking, writing and listening comprehension. Grammar in isolation is not recognized as a viable means of teaching the English language and does not promote language acquisition. In order for students to apply the grammatical rules of English they must receive grammar instruction embedded through the language domains.
Some ELLs speak and sound like native English-speakers. Why are they in ESL?

The language proficiency test (ACCESS) assesses language skills across four domains: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Some ELLs have strong speaking skills, while other language skills (reading, writing, and listening) are still developing. ESL support will allow these students to further develop their language skills until enough proficiency is obtained to attain academic success.

What strategies should teachers use to make content comprehensible to ELLs at varying proficiency levels?

Explicit instruction of vocabulary.
Use of visuals—pictures, graphic organizers, timelines, charts, etc.
Use of sentence scaffolds—sentence frames, sentence starters, model sentences, etc.
Student engagement in conversations—think-pair-share, follow-up questions, cooperative groups and pairs.

The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) outlines and describes more research-based strategies:
http://www.cal.org/siop