

ACADEMIC ENGLISH MASTERY PROGRAM

FOR
STANDARD ENGLISH
LEARNERS



LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
Instructional Support Services

LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Division of Instruction

The Los Angeles Unified School District's Academic English Mastery Program is a comprehensive, research-based program designed to address the language needs of African American, Mexican American, Hawaiian American, and Native American students for whom Standard English is not native. The program incorporates into the curriculum instructional strategies that facilitate the acquisition of standard American and academic English in classroom environments that validate, value, and build upon the language and culture of students.

Its primary goal:

Students will learn to use standard American and academic English proficiently, and in the process experience increased literacy acquisition and greater academic achievement.

HISTORY OF THE ACADEMIC ENGLISH MASTERY PROGRAM

The Los Angeles Unified School District's Academic English Mastery Program was developed out of the 1989 LAUSD study titled *The Children Can No Longer Wait: An Action Plan to End Low Achievement and Establish Educational Excellence*. The study identified strategies to develop and implement a rigorous district curriculum for students whose needs were not addressed in the LAUSD Master Plan for the Education of Limited-English-Proficient Students. Its recommendations included recognizing and validating students' home language while at the same time facilitating their acquisition of standard American and academic English.

A Language Development Program Committee convened from July 1988 through March 1989 to develop a comprehensive plan to provide staff development for district administrators and teachers which included information on the history and development of the language varieties spoken by standard English Learners (SELs). The work of the committee was the culmination of decades of study on this issue by educators and linguists across the country.

In 1989, the Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education authorized the implementation of a Districtwide program—the Language Development Program for African American Students (LDPAAS)—to address the language needs of the then over 92,000 African American students in the district, 80 percent of whom, according to the research, were Limited Standard English-Proficient (LSEP). Implementation of the LDPAAS began in 1990-91 and originally targeted 19 elementary schools.

Since then, the program has expanded to serve 70 elementary and middle schools. In 1998, the name of the program was changed to the Academic English Mastery Program (AEMP) to reflect the program's broadened scope to include other students (Hawaiian, Mexican, and Native American) for whom Standard English is not native.

THE PROGRAM MISSION :

The mission of the program is to assure that students whose primary language does not match the language of instruction, will have equal access to a rigorous standards-based educational curriculum and post secondary career opportunities.

A basic tenet of the program is that the following barriers exist for these students:

- Limited mastery of Standard American and Academic English
- Adverse educator attitudes toward their primary language
- Inadequate knowledge of their native language, history, and culture
- Insufficient parent involvement with the curriculum, and support for it
- A paucity of instructional strategies that effectively promote language and literacy acquisition and learning in SELs.

The program endeavors to eliminate these barriers and to assure Standard English Language Learners equal access to the core curricula and increased academic achievement.

THE PROGRAM STRANDS :

FUNCTIONAL SKILLS IN STANDARD AMERICAN ENGLISH

Teaching Standard American and academic English to students for whom standard English is not native using research based methodologies that emphasize language experience and promote the development of cognitive academic language proficiency.

LITERACY ACQUISITION

Facilitating literacy acquisition through language development.

CULTURAL GROUNDING

Conveying knowledge on ancient Africa, Mexico, Hawaii and North America: their cultures, history, and impact on the modern world, with an emphasis on historical and contemporary achievers.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND SUPPORT

Providing educational seminars for parents to enhance their knowledge of African American, Mexican American, Hawaiian American, and Native American history, culture, and language; increase their proficiency in the use of standard American English; and thereby empower them with effective strategies for supporting language, literacy, and learning in their children.

THE PROGRAM RATIONALE :

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education reported in *A Nation at Risk* on the declining competitiveness of American education and noted that, “Part of what is at risk is the promise first made on this continent. All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost.” Full equality and economic empowerment begins with education. Still, more than a decade after the report, too many standard English Learners are failing in American schools, interned in classrooms where their language is devalued, and teachers’ low expectations and limited understandings about their language and culture negatively impact academic achievement.

Many Standard English Learners (SELs) arrive at school in America speaking a language that differs from the language of instruction. This “language difference” impacts academic success. For many African American, Mexican American, Hawaiian American, and Native American students, this language variation effects the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. How teachers view and respond to these language differences significantly influences the students’ ability to acquire literacy and other academic skills.

According to recent research this population of students—Standard English Language Learners (SELs)—are experiencing the most difficulty in American schools, and have the lowest achievement scores on standardized tests. Teachers’ low opinions and misunderstandings about these students’ language is cited as antecedents of failure. In order to effectively educate this population, educators must have an understanding of the students’ language and culture, an appreciation of the rich experiences and “funds of knowledge” they bring to the learning environment, and a knowledge of instructional methodologies that facilitate learning.

Language is foundational to education. Educators must make use of the available research to design instruction that guarantees all students equity in accessing rigorous standards-based curricula, post secondary educational opportunities, and career options. The Los Angeles Unified School District’s *Academic English Mastery Program* (AEMP) is a research based intervention model designed to address the Superintendent’s major instructional focus areas - English language development and literacy acquisition.

“**N**o more important public service exists than to ensure that when children leave our schools as young adults, they are empowered with the language skills they need to be successful, contributing members of an information society that relies increasingly on the power and richness of language for effective communication.”

– California Department of Education
English Language Arts Framework

THE PROGRAM PROVIDES :

- Educational seminars and salary point courses for teachers
- School site strategy and demonstration workshops and lesson study collaboratives
- Opportunities for teacher collaboration around student work with a focus on critical inquiry and peer coaching through Grade Level Student Achievement Teams (GSAT).
- Workshops and in-service classes for parents and paraeducators
- Collaborative dialogue with school and local district administrators
- Training in the use of technology as a tool in language acquisition
- Weekend professional development conferences
- Staff development and training for teachers, teacher leaders, and paraeducators including a weeklong Summer Institute

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR EDUCATORS :

- The unique history and culture of each child must be recognized and respected.
- A student's language is inextricably tied to his or her family and self-concept.
- Teaching methodology must accommodate the culture and language of the child.
- The teacher must provide as realistic a context for language experiences and second-language acquisition as possible using materials from the child's culture.
- The student must be culturally grounded through a supported self-identity.
- When the student acquires mastery of a new language system, he or she becomes capable of cross-cultural communication.

For additional information contact:



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