

# Nevada's Asset-Based, Research-Based Approach to Supporting English Language Learners and Multilingual Learners

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Sandra Leu Bonanno, Rachel Lagunoff, and Jennifer Blitz

In 2018, the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) convened to develop an English Language Development (ELD) Standards Framework in response to the rising population of state's English and multilingual learners.

When adopted, the ELD Standards Framework supports asset-based ways to integrate content and language instruction, a research-based approach that supports the learning of multilingual learners. The process of implementing the framework also strengthens partnerships with regional professional development programs and local educational agencies (LEAs).

Ultimately, the NDE aims for its teachers, administrators, and educators to develop a strong understanding of the framework and integrate it effectively into their instructional practice. Beginning in 2020, the Region 15 Comprehensive Center (R15CC) served as critical partner to NDE in this initiative. The R15CC technical assistance team aimed to increase the capacity of the NDE partners to create high-quality professional learning, evaluate the efficacy of this professional learning, and partner with LEAs to develop sustainable systems of instructional support and continued learning.

## **Building Awareness and Piloting a New Professional Learning Course**

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To increase the awareness of the framework, the NDE and R15CC created digital informational and marketing materials, including a brief video overview, two educator courses (EDU 288 and ELD 201), and a webinar series. In addition, the NDE and R15CC developed a connections document that describes how the current Nevada Educator Performance Framework, a resource for evaluating teacher and administrator performance, overlaps with practices recommended in the ELD Standards Framework. The NDE and R15CC then focused on creating professional learning to build the capacity of pre-service and in-service teachers to adopt asset-based integrated content and language instruction using the framework.

NDE piloted a new professional learning course, EDU 288: Foundations for Teaching Multilingual Learners, to help educators employ the framework

across K–12 settings. The course was designed for pre-service teachers to build their capacity to support multilingual learners in accessing academic content equitably while simultaneously developing academic English proficiency. The course provides a foundational knowledge of the theories that undergird the framework, an introduction to state guidance and tools, and opportunities to practice creating lessons and using state guidance to plan integrated content and language instruction.

During the course development, R15CC provided expertise on the course content and organization. The R15CC team also provided tools, such as storyboard outlines, to support the development of professional learning activities and materials that adhered to a unified vision, purpose, and cohesive structure. The team brokered relationships with web design engineers who provided additional capacity for NDE's content developers.

Thus far, the NDE has facilitated three cycles of EDU 288, impacting the capacity of 195 participants to provide asset-based integrated content and language instruction for multilingual learners in their contexts. Participants in the courses represented at least 75 percent of all LEAs in the state, coming from multiple regions and gaining the potential to share new knowledge and practices in their local contexts. The NDE has also established long-term partnerships with a local community college to continue offering the course to provide pre-service students with a potential path to becoming educators and build the capacity of in-service teachers to improve their efforts to support multilingual learners in their classrooms.

## **Integrating an Internal Evaluation to Support Continuous Improvement**

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In fall 2022, R15CC partnered with the NDE to conduct an internal evaluation of the professional learning course EDU 288 pilot. The evaluation aimed to engage the NDE in continuous improvement and build its capacity for

collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data to guide course revisions.

An internal evaluation is an evaluation of a product, process, or project conducted by internal members of the project team who were also involved in development. Sometimes, this process is called self-assessment or self-evaluation.

An internal evaluation involves creating an evaluation plan by setting evaluative measures and questions and considering the data type needed to answer these questions. Internal evaluation teams must then build evaluation measures into the process, product, or project they are measuring.

Alongside the implementation, the NDE administered intermittent surveys; hosted focus groups; and graded artifacts, such as assignments, journal responses, and the summative assessment, to glean data that answered key evaluation questions related to the efficacy, organization, and usability of the course. This internal evaluation examined the degree to which EDU 288 effectively and clearly disseminated guidance created by the state and developed the capacity of educators to understand and utilize this guidance.

R15CC presented the findings and recommendations of the internal evaluation report through a data presentation that reviewed the major themes and the sample quotes or descriptive statistics from multiple data sources used to create each theme. During the review of the presentation and the development of the executive summary of the report, a protocol was used to ensure equity of voice whereby each member reflected individually on their reactions to the themes and recommendations of the report before debriefing as a whole group. Based on the internal evaluation, the NDE collectively selected the findings and recommendations to prioritize in its revisions of EDU 288. R15CC was a thought partner with NDE as they revised EDU 288, at times providing external consultants to improve the course usability and

ensure that the module objectives and directions were clear. Ultimately, revisions for increased usability impacted the delivery and clarity of the course content and activities, making it easier for participants to understand the purpose of each module and draw on module resources to achieve the learning goal.

## Findings From the Internal Evaluation

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Even in early implementation, data demonstrated that the course was making a significant impact on increasing the capacity of educators to provide asset-based integrated content and language instruction to multilingual learners. In the first cohort of educators, approximately 90 percent of participants reported having a greater understanding of the principles that undergird the ELD Standards Framework, including an asset-based approach to teaching multilingual learners and a functional approach to language instruction. Further, 100 percent of all participants reported an increased awareness of core guidance in the framework. Approximately 85 percent of respondents agreed they were likely to “apply the knowledge and skills” learned in the course “to implement effective instructional practices” to support multilingual learners.

During focus groups and surveys, participants stated, “I was able to immediately use the information from the course [in] my profession.” The course also prompted greater awareness and application of the available broad state guidance that benefits the education of multilingual learners. For example, multiple focus group participants highlighted the utility of tools and guidance in the course—such as a lesson plan template informed by state performance standards and instructional practices in the framework—and stated that they were eager to share these tools with their colleagues at their school sites.

## Applying Learnings From the Continuous Improvement Process

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The NDE has since applied the data collection and analysis process to subsequent implementations of EDU 288. The NDE has also built a similar process for feedback and continuous improvement into the creation of ELD 201: Advancing Academic English Language Development for Nevada's Multilingual Learners, a second, more streamlined professional learning course for in-service teachers. However, this course requires partnerships with LEAs and regional professional development programs, which provide their own facilitators and adopt this course as a part of their professional learning infrastructure. R15CC also supports the NDE in creating resources, such as an observational protocol, that LEA and school leaders can use to provide instructional support for teachers through continuous improvement cycles.

## Tips for Your Own Work

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As a result of this multiyear project, the NDE has created a robust series of professional learning for pre-service and in-service educators, disseminated guidance about how the ELD Standards Framework operates in alignment with other statewide tools, and put in place a process for continuously improving their professional learning modules through internal evaluations. This project supported the NDE in taking on greater ownership of evaluating the effectiveness of its courses and using data for decision-making.

As you begin your own work to strengthen systems for English and multilingual learners, R15CC offers three tips based on learnings from our NDE partnership:

- Data transparency is critical. Taking time to review the collected data and analysis process was crucial for building the analysis capacity of state educational agency (SEA) partners and cultivating trust in the findings and recommendations of the internal evaluation.
- Build a repository of resources. When conducting the internal evaluation of EDU 288, R15CC co-created data instruments, such as surveys and focus group protocols, with the NDE to continue to apply these instruments to evaluate subsequent professional learning courses.
- Consider how to sustain knowledge capacity. R15CC conducted the internal evaluation as a capacity-building exercise to support the NDE in incorporating the internal evaluation structure into its own processes. Thus, R15CC was thoughtful about equipping SEA partners with survey instrument tools or analysis templates to independently implement continuous improvement cycles for the future.

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