



## ELEVEN THINGS EDUCATORS WORKING WITH ENGLISH LEARNERS IN HIGH-POVERTY RURAL SETTINGS SHOULD KNOW

By the teachers of Project STELLAR

**1. Be a welcoming community for English Learners (ELs) and their families.**

*Make your students and their families feel welcome at your school. Living in a different culture and participating in a different school system is intimidating! Help ELs and their families to learn how your school works, what kinds of expectations the school has of students and teachers, and what students' and parents' rights are. Also, respect and value your ELs' languages and cultures by integrating them into classroom content, activities, and materials, as well as school events and organizations. Find ways to encourage parent participation in your school.*

**2. Be prepared to work with students with little to no English proficiency.**

*Some students will speak little to no English at first, and you will need to learn to communicate with them. Nonverbal communication is key--hand gestures for basic needs/safety will be helpful. Be prepared to act words out. Use your higher-level English proficiency EL students as a resource for other kids. They are a good support and often, but not always, be willing to help.*

**3. Be prepared to work with students that have varying levels of English proficiency and academic proficiency in their home language.**

*Try to build a library having books with varied proficiency levels. Find resources and activities in multiple languages and at multiple levels. If you don't know how to differentiate instruction for different proficiency levels, find resources to enhance your knowledge and abilities. Check out useful websites like the National Rural Education Association and Colorín Colorado. Broaden your interests to integrate other content in your teaching and/or interactions with students. Encourage translanguaging practices.*

**4. Find different ways and tools to communicate with parents.**

*Don't expect English to be the primary language of your EL students' families. If you are lucky enough to have someone who can translate, they won't always be available and can't be in two places at once. Google translate is your best friend. Even though parents may understand spoken language, they may not be able to read. Also, learn how to deal with uncomfortable silence. Play background music at times and adapt to the background noise of translating during translation or instruction. Spanish, Chinese, and other languages have dialects—be aware that speakers of the “same” language will speak with different vocabulary.*

**5. Prepare to have late evening conferences with families and impromptu meetings.**

*Have a flexible time frame for meeting parents. Families work long hours or several jobs, so they often cannot meet during the regularly scheduled school times. Find ways to schedule them outside these times. Don't be surprised if you end up having impromptu meetings with parents when you run into them in the supermarket or discount store!*

**6. Figure out ways to grade EL students on grade level assessments.**

*Use the students' home language on assessments if you can. There is no easy way or ready-made guide for teachers to grade ELs appropriately, so be prepared for a challenge.*

**7. Be aware that EL students and families are not all the same.**

*Students who speak the same language, such as Spanish, are not necessarily from the same country or the same culture. Also, ELs and their families come to the U.S. for different reasons and from different economic and sociopolitical conditions. Don't make assumptions about who your students are. Be open to learning about them!*

**8. Prepare for students disappearing for weeks, months, or permanently.**

*EL students may need to work, take care of family members, or undertake other family responsibilities. Be supportive of your EL students while you have them. They may, unfortunately, even be forced to re-locate and so leave your school community.*

**9. Work and share with other teachers.**

*Don't be afraid to ask for help. Other teachers are probably experiencing similar interactions with ELs, so you're not alone. Share ideas and resources. Collaboration with other teachers can be life-saving. At the same time, be your own advocate! If you want professional development opportunities, you will need to seek them out.*

**10. Every teacher is a language teacher.**

*Look for how you can bring a language focus into your teaching no matter what subject or level you teach. Learning the language of academic disciplines—math, science, whatever—is crucial for ELs to develop knowledge of your field. For example, learning science is also about learning how to use language like a scientist. Encourage your colleagues to see themselves as language teachers no matter what they teach, and help them integrate a language focus into their instruction.*

**11. Be an advocate for your ELs and their families.**

*You may be part of a small group of advocates for your ELs and their families. Find like-minded teachers. Identify community groups or resources that could provide help, such as adult ESL classes. Identify health, food, and housing resources in your community. Create a bilingual resource guide for families that includes local health, dental, community, religious, and social support services. Work with your school and district to create a statement in support of your ELs and their families.*