

Talking Points and Strategies to Get Your Administrators on Board with WIDA

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This article provides strategies and key talking points when approaching administrators on issues of WIDA implementation, staying legal, and most importantly, meeting the needs of English learners. It offers tips on analyzing the pathways to decision-making in organizations, along with how to influence decision makers on issues of professional development and meeting EL students' needs. Some key points of discussion are: Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) requirements that schools implement the WIDA Standards and train teachers; Indiana's A – F Accountability system's inclusion of student observed growth in equal proportion to student achievement; the resurgence of focus on laws and the rights of ELs to a free and appropriate public education; preparing a menu of training options to share with the leadership team; research on the importance of the school corporation supporting, including and providing training opportunities for ENL leaders; and key areas supporting ELs that the superintendent can influence.

Keywords: WIDA Standards; leadership; strategies; implementation; accountability; training; support.

INTRODUCTION

The individuals who are put in a position of responsibility for the English Learners (ELs) in school corporations go by many names. Some are called English as a New Language (ENL) coaches, directors (of ENL or of many areas), ENL coordinators, ENL teachers, community liaisons, para-professionals, and so on. For many of these individuals, their role does not carry

cabinet level leadership status, which can make it challenging to ensure that the needs of the ELs are being met because they do not have a place at the decision making table. This article will provide some strategies and key talking points when approaching administrators on issues of WIDA implementation, staying legal, and most importantly, meeting the needs of ELs.

It will depend on the person's position in the corporation hierarchy, but there are some general approaches to take. Start by analyzing the pathways to decision-making in the organization. What is the process for getting an item on an important agenda? Is it possible to make a presentation to the school board? Determine a big event in the lives of the EL students, their progress, a special program, or an award they are receiving, and get this put on the agenda. Use pictures or bring the students themselves, if possible. Make it personal, but make it short, maybe 10 minutes. Follow up by sending key individuals links to articles such as the series that ran in The Indianapolis Star recently, *Lost in Translation* (Wang, 2015). Officials need to know that this group of students is getting visibility and "air-time" in the media and community. There is somewhat of a marketing strategy that must occur in order to get recognition. The message needs to be one of hope and must promote the additive value of ELs and EL programming, as opposed to the usual subtractive approach.

Ultimately, it is essential to identify which group or individual makes decisions on issues of professional development and meeting students' needs. These may be two different groups or individuals, but they are related when it comes to meeting the needs of ELs. Identify individuals who have a voice that is listened to by decision-makers and target them for support. This may not be a cabinet level administrator, but perhaps a teacher who has the ear of the principal, or a principal who has the ear of the superintendent. Find the opportunity to have lunch with that person in the faculty lounge, or ask for a meeting if this is a person you do not normally have

access to. Agenda items and talking points for these meetings will be discussed below, but the first step is to build a relationship with key individuals. In doing so, there is a delicate balance between being the squeaky wheel that needs to be greased, and the wheel that will be left in the garage where it will not be a nuisance any longer. In other words, provide helpful and useful information and assistance that is likely to build a reciprocal relationship, but do not badger the individual until they run the other way when they see you coming. The militant approach may work in the beginning, but it tends to backfire in the end. Making allies builds a much more lasting outcome in the end.

How to Get Started

Here are some talking points centered on information that will cause decision-makers to listen and on what they need to know:

1. Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) has required that schools implement the WIDA Standards and train teachers. The percentage of teachers trained must be reported to the IDOE. Additionally, a training plan is required as part of Title III funding and there are links to Title I. The IDOE has a resource page with promising practices for implementation (<http://www.doe.in.gov/elme/english-learner-resources>), and another page dedicated to WIDA (<http://www.doe.in.gov/elme/wida-english-language-development-eld-standards-framework>).

2. Indiana's A – F Accountability system has been updated to include student observed growth in equal proportion to student achievement (Indiana Department of Education, <http://www.doe.in.gov/accountability/indiana-student-centered-accountability>). Growth is now considered as important as passing state mandated assessments. According to an article in Chalkbeat Indiana by Shaina Cavazos (May 7, 2015), “Schools will be required to show any

group of vulnerable children that score below the rest of the school — such as ethnic minorities, children in special education and English language learners — is catching up, or the highest grade they can earn is a B (<http://in.chalkbeat.org/2015/05/07/a-to-f-changes-pass-after-more-state-board-drama/#.VVn7DflVhBc>).” This is especially important for our EL population because this group has tremendous potential to demonstrate growth, even if they have not yet reach the English language proficiency level necessary to pass the state tests. Schools will receive credit for this group that can certainly show progress with the support and attention they need. In fact, school corporations in Indiana have, on the whole, passed Annual Measurable Achievement Objective Part 1 – Making Progress for students improving their English language proficiency levels, and passed all of the AMAOs in the 2013-14 academic year (Indiana Department of Education Compass, 2013-14).

College and career readiness is another area that is measured on the school report card. The United States labor market is experiencing a growing need for competent individuals with postsecondary education while the state of Indiana has a low percentage (34.4%) of individuals holding postsecondary 2 or 4 year degrees. It is predicted that by 2020, approximately 60% of the job vacancies in Indiana will require some form of postsecondary education (Indiana Commission for Higher Education). The current emphasis on college and career readiness as promoted in state education standards, and touted by politicians and business leaders clearly reflects this imminent demand for individuals to be prepared for the next step once they graduate from high school. In the A-F accountability system, schools are graded according to the percentage of students who earn passing scores on Advanced Placement exams, International Baccalaureate exams, three college credits, and passing scores on industry approached certification exams. With the recent requirement by the Indiana Department of Education for all

schools to incorporate the WIDA English language development and academic language proficiency standards in all classrooms involving English learners, it is clear that our linguistically diverse students are an important part of the equation to move Indiana's economic future forward. It will be vital that ELs are provided equal opportunities to High Ability, AP, IB, Early College, Dual Credit classes, and career and technical training opportunities, with the added support WIDA implementation can provide.

3. The law, as it pertains to ELs, has been around for as long as the Civil Rights Movement, however, there is a resurgence of focus on these laws and the rights of ELs to a free and appropriate public education brought on by changes in demographics, among other reasons. The number of English Learners (ELs) in schools in the United States is increasing and will continue to do so at exponential rates. Indiana has seen 409.3% growth of English learners (EL) who currently represent five percent of learners (U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition, 2010). An achievement gap of 19.7% in Math and 28.4% in English Language Arts exists between ELs and non-EL students tested in Indiana in 2012-13 (Indiana Department of Education Compass, 2012-13). Even with these astounding statistics and growing realization, it seems that the world of ENL in terms of laws, policies and leadership development is years behind other subgroups of high need students, such as students with disabilities (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2009). If action is not taken until this situation becomes dire with 40% of the school-aged population in United States public schools being English learners (projected by 2030), it will be too late for several generations of students, not to mention the damage that would be done to society and the economy (Thomas & Collier, 2002). The education field needs to be proactive and not wait for law suits and legislators to make decisions that will dictate how decisions are made rather than doing what is best for kids

now. The adoption of the WIDA Standards is a good start, but the field of English as a New (or Second) Language is lagging behind the need for serving these students. All school personnel must be aware of the law. A few key laws to emphasize can be found in the Indiana Department of Education's Director's Toolkit for English Learners 2014-2015

<http://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/elme/full-directors-toolkit-timeline-events-8-26-14.pdf>.

This also provides guidance on everything a school corporation needs to know to stay within the law and meet policy requirements. WIDA is one tool that schools can use to be in compliance with the law as it pertains to ELs.

4. Have a menu of training options prepared to share with the leadership team, or key individuals who are decision makers in the organization.
 - Start with 1 hour introductions in all buildings. Focus half day training at priority school buildings and those with a high incidence of ELs - breaking down learning into manageable parts, then reach out to the lower incidence buildings. The next step will be to offer more advanced training with stipends outside of the school day. (Beth Williams and Brad Sheppard - Elkhart Community Schools)
 - Train counselors as one piece of the puzzle (or those in charge of scheduling) and look for a cohort of teachers to cluster students with - this could be a "team" approach. This would focus training on a smaller group of teachers and ideally, a group that is willing and supportive. This would also cover all content areas from the beginning. This would work for schools that have perhaps under 30%. If there are so many ELs that they are inevitably in all classrooms, another approach would be needed. (Donna Albrecht - Anderson University)

- Training on WIDA with admin team - do a short language learning simulation in a language other than English to stimulate buy-in, then talk about why WIDA is important, 20 minutes (with Superintendent involved). Then ask for a 1 hour training with administration as a follow up. Train administration on assessment report and what it means, paired with language levels. Vital to their work with parents and community. (Pam Storm, Anderson Community Schools & Donna Albrecht, Anderson University)
- Work with preschool and KG to provide training to teachers and parents about the importance of developing bilingual students, not subtractive bilingualism. Support home culture and language along with learning a new culture and language. Partner with other organization doing parent training to reach out to ENL parent community. (Donna Albrecht - Anderson University)
- Train ENL staff to a high level using a 1 day training during school in the fall – could partner with other corporations. The ENL staff are vital to implementation as coaches to the other staff. (Donna Albrecht - Anderson University)
- Half day each quarter or before/after school once a month training with a representative group of teachers from key buildings to focus on how to use WIDA as a way to frame differentiation for ELs (stronger teaching practices that are research based - good for all students, but vital for ELs). (Donna Albrecht - Anderson University)
- Work with High Ability programs to identify CLDs/ELs and incorporate them into these programs at representative levels, as is required by law. (Donna Albrecht - Anderson University)

- Train career and technical tracks, Early College, Dual Credit, AP and IB teachers.
(Donna Albrecht - Anderson University)

5. Share research on the importance of the school corporation supporting, including and providing training opportunities for ENL leaders, whatever their titles may be. Much research has been conducted on leadership in the school setting, pointing to a strong correlation between leadership and student outcomes, teacher efficacy, and teacher performance (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003; Leithwood, et al., 2004). It is clear that strong leadership of programs serving English learners is vital. A recent study supported the importance of having experience and training when it comes to effective leadership of ENL programs (Albrecht, 2014). Another finding of this study, as reported by the survey respondents who are in the ENL leadership role, was that ENL leaders felt relatively competent on the management side, but less so with instructional leadership. While they can check off all the boxes and fill out the forms properly, schools are still not meeting Annual Measureable Achievement Objective (AMAO) requirements as mandated by the state and federal governments. Findings from the study show that ENL program leaders (formal or informal) in Indiana are frustrated that many mainstream teachers are not equipped to meet the needs of ELs in their classrooms, that they are generally not adequately supported to effectively lead the program, and that ENL programs are not adequately funded from the state and corporations (Albrecht, 2014).

School superintendents can help by being aware that the level of involvement the ENL leader has in the design and development of the ENL program significantly affects the implementation of that program (as determined by self-reported performance on AMAO requirements and other factors) (Albrecht, 2014). Furthermore, this study showed that the ENL leader's knowledge of second language acquisition and program design, along with efficacy for

leadership, all significantly affect program implementation. The study indicates that the person charged with leadership in this area needs to have a level of responsibility, confidence, knowledge in the field, and a place at the leadership table. Even if the district has a low incidence of ELs, leadership development must be promoted for the individual responsible for supervising services for ELs.

Key areas supporting ELs that the superintendent can influence are:

- providing instructional leaders with appropriate training, support, and encouragement – superintendents can seek professional development in this complex field, provide PD opportunities for ENL leaders/coaches/teachers, principals, and for general education teachers - a body of knowledge exists that is unique to this field in terms of second language acquisition and research on effectiveness of instructional programming that is not gained in a traditional administrative program or without specific studies in this content area;
- giving ENL leaders/coaches a place at the leadership table – superintendents can assess where their ENL leader fits into the overall hierarchy of the school system and ensure that representation is provided for the ENL leader (or a knowledgeable person on staff that can advise about serving ELs appropriately and effectively); and,
- championing the fact that demographics are changing, that English learners have rights that must be upheld by law, and that supporting them will lead to ultimate gains in society and the economy.

(Albrecht, 2014)

An article outlining the points in number five above that ENL leaders can share with their district leaders is located in the April 2015 edition of The Indiana Association of Public School

Superintendents (<http://www.iapss-in.org/iapss-newsletters/april-2015-iapss-newsletter/april-2015-article-english-learners-matter-what-superintendents-need-to-know/>).

Conclusion

As Leithwood et al. (2004) found, the effects of leadership are seen the most in areas where there is the most need. The changing demographic makeup of this nation indicates that educating English learners is a growing area of high need. The WIDA initiative is a powerful statement and action step towards providing an effective and inclusive free and appropriate public education to our English learning students, a group for whom the need is certainly great.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Donna Albrecht has taught and administered in local and international PK-12, and university settings for 25 years. She has taught IB courses, social studies, high ability and ESL students. Donna has designed and administered ESL programs in Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and in Indiana. Before joining Anderson University, Donna was the intermediate school principal at the International School of Indiana. In her current role, Donna directs and teaches in the English Language Teaching Program and conducts Professional Learning Community groups, focusing on culturally and linguistically diverse students, and high ability learners in Madison, Hamilton, and Marion County schools. Donna has an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership, and Ed.S. degree from Ball State University in School Superintendency; an M.A. in Teaching English as a Foreign Language from The American University in Cairo, Egypt; and a B.A. from Anderson University in political science and economics. Donna is licensed as a superintendent, building level administrator, and teacher (ESL, High Ability, PK-12; and social studies 5-12) in Indiana.

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