

## **Academic Language Development at Excell Academy: ELL Services Plan**

*“The mission of Excell’s Academic Language Development program is to ensure that our students develop proficiency in academic language, and to encourage them to see both their first languages and Academic English as powerful assets for life-long success.”*

### **Rationale**

Academic language proficiency is crucial for achievement across all academic subjects, including English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. How can students be successful in classroom interactions and assessments if they do not understand the presentation of new information or the questions asked of them? If they do understand the content, how can students effectively express that knowledge without using language? Academic language is the underpinning of academic success. Language is both how students learn, and how students communicate what they have learned.

Excell’s Academic Language Development (ALD) team is dedicated to providing language instruction which supports our students’ needs across the language-modalities of listening, speaking, reading and writing. We equip our English Language Learners (ELLs) with systematic language support that is grounded in clear, research-based best practices and a strong academic curriculum, to ensure that all of our ELLs acquire the language skills to be successful in college and in their careers.

We follow the the procedures outlined in this document to support our students and comply with Minnesota-State requirements.

### **Identification and Eligibility Procedures**

#### **Step 1: Identification**

A Home Language Questionnaire (HLQ) is a required component of enrollment documents for all students at Excell Academy. The HLQ is the best resource and record of a child’s linguistic background. An accurate record of linguistic background allows the ALD department to support each student’s unique linguistic needs.

The purpose of the HLQ is to identify students who may not be proficient in Standard American English, and who, therefore, may need language support to fully access Excell’s academic curriculum. The HLQ asks which languages are spoken at the student’s home, and what the student’s first language was. (See HLQ sample in Resources section of this document).

Families fill out the HLQ independently, and submit it to the registrar with all other enrollment documents. The HLQ should be translated into the languages spoken by Excell Academy families. Completed enrollment packets are processed by the school secretary. All HLQs indicating that languages in addition to Standard American English are spoken in a student’s home will be forwarded to the ALD department.

#### **Step 2: Language Assessment**

Upon receiving an HLQ indicating that languages in addition to Standard American English are spoken at a student’s home, the ALD department will assess that student’s

Academic English proficiency in reading, writing, speaking and listening. The ALD department will administer the WIDA-ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT), as mandated by the State. In addition, it may consider data obtained through the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP), previous years ACCESS test scores, and teacher observations. A composite score of 4.5 and below, or any domain less than 5.0 on the W-APT indicates eligibility for direct language instruction through the ALD program.

### **Step 3: Family Notification and Coding**

At this point, based on the results of the W-APT and other assessments made in steps 1 and 2, the school will determine whether a student is or is not an ELL. The decision will be made by our licensed ALD staff, who will use the results of the language assessments plus other relevant information so far gathered about the student.

Families will be notified of student eligibility for ALD services within 10 days of the ALD department's receipt of assessment data. A telephone or face-to-face conversation, either with an ALD- or classroom teacher, is the initial form of contact. At this point, ALD programming and support services will be explained, and teachers will be able to answer questions and receive family input.

A follow-up letter from the ALD department will provide additional information to families, and will be sent within 30 days of the ALD department's receipt of a student's assessment data. The letters will state the reasons for identification, the student's proficiency levels in listening, speaking, reading and writing, the amount of time and type of EL services s/he will receive, testing information, and program exit requirements. Parents retain the right to refuse service.

Excell Academy codes all students determined to be ELLs in Minnesota's student information database (MARSS) to indicate ELL status. This coding includes the student's home language, LEP status, and their start date for language services.

### **Step 4: Placement**

The ALD department provides service to our ELs in the context of grade- and proficiency-leveled WIN groups. A fundamental element of the academic day at Excell Academy is the WIN-cycle. For 45-minute periods, daily, our grade-level classrooms are merged and divided for targeted small-group interventions. At this time, ELs meet in small groups with licensed ALD staff members. With three ALD teachers, we are able to provide three leveled groups for most grades, and our groups typically range in size from 4-8 students.

We use data from the WIDA ACCESS test and W-APT screener test when determining the initial placement of students into leveled groups. When students need greater challenges, or different support, however, our staff does whatever it can to adjust instructional styles and groupings to guarantee student success.

### **Step 5: Instruction**

The ALD department's strong curriculum is the foundation for our work with students. Though our curriculum differs across grade levels, we always seek to empower students with the language tools they need to express their understanding of content in an academic manner. With most of our groups, we use the same blended Language Arts/Science/Social Studies resource series as content teachers, but we approach it using a language lens. Using the same curriculum reinforces content and gives students additional opportunities for practice. Within our leveled WIN-groups, we focus on appropriate Academic English skills to support comprehension and expression of grade-level content. Our instruction is particularly tailored to the needs of Global English speakers, the majority of our student demographic.

Language instruction at Excell Academy is structured around research-based, best instructional practices. We have clear Learning Objectives with progressively more complex Success Criteria. To find language-based Learning Objectives, our teachers use the WIDA CAN-DO descriptors, Model Performance Indicators, Minnesota English Language Arts academic standards, and Excell's ELA-ELD Matrices. As a team, we deconstruct those complex resources and develop rigorous language-based units for instruction. We isolate pieces of language that students will need to be successful in their content classrooms. These skills become our Success Criteria, and the focus of future individual lessons. As students move through the Success Criteria over the course of a unit, they build up their self-efficacy as well as their language abilities. Tasks become both increasingly academically and linguistically rigorous: we move from learning new vocabulary, to practicing with accountable sentence frames, to independently analyzing texts and composing academic paragraphs and essays. Recognizing their personal growth, students become increasingly confident and linguistically competent.

### *5.1 Annual Progress Evaluations*

Ongoing assessment will determine continued ALD services. All ELLs at Excell Academy participate in Minnesota's statewide Academic English proficiency assessments (ACCESS), Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments in Reading and Mathematics (MCAs), district achievement assessments (MAP and FAST), as well as classroom assessments in English language development, reading, math, science and social studies. All student data is reviewed regularly by the ALD staff.

### **Step 6: Exiting the ALD Program**

The State of Minnesota states that, "ELs who reach a level of English proficiency that no longer prevents them from fully accessing the curriculum of the school may be exited from the ESL and/or bilingual program. The decision to exit a student from ESL and/or bilingual service should be based on multiple measures." These measures must be "developmentally appropriate" and may include "teacher recommendation, parental input, and assessments of English language proficiency in speaking, listening, reading and writing." (Minnesota Department of Education: English Learner Identification and Program Basics)

At Excell Academy, the multiple measures we use include WIDA ACCESS test results, FAST, MAP, and MCA scores, and teacher observations from both content and language classrooms. Because the ACCESS test is developed with the sole purpose of evaluating Academic Language proficiency, because it is state- and nationally-normed, and because it assesses all four language domains (listening, speaking, reading, writing), it is the language assessment that we consider to be the most accurate and reliable.

### *6.1 ACCESS Evaluation*

We follow Minnesota-State recommendations when evaluating proficiency on the WIDA ACCESS test, i.e. when a student obtains a composite/overall score of 5 or more, and has no individual domain score (listening, speaking, reading, writing) below a 4.0, we consider them to be proficient.

### *6.2 Additional Valid Student Test Data*

When a student demonstrates proficiency, or near proficiency, on the ACCESS test, the ALD team will gather and consider additional valid testing data from that student's academic

year. This data includes MAP scores (grades K-2), MCA scores (grades 3-8), and FAST scores, as well as results from classroom “Common Assessments”.

### *6.3 ALD Exiting Meeting*

The ALD team organizes a meeting with all relevant content teachers (English Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies) to collaboratively discuss individual students’ data. Together, the language and content teachers consider whether the student’s language is proficient enough to allow him/her to access all parts of Excell’s academic curriculum.

### *6.4 Reclassification in MARSS*

When a consensus is reached at an Exiting Meeting regarding a student’s Academic English proficiency, the ALD coordinator will adjust the ALD roster. S/he will communicate all changes to the roster with the school secretary before the end of the academic school year. All students who have attained proficiency in Academic English, and been removed from the ALD roster, will be reclassified in Minnesota’s student information database (MARSS) to indicate their non-LEP status.

## **Resources & Additional Information for Families**

### **Students with Disabilities**

A student whose first language is not English, who has a disability, may not demonstrate proficiency in a typical manner when assessed. Therefore, it is critical to collect information regarding participation in other specialized programs during the ALD identification and eligibility process, especially for a student who is NOT new to the country, has been in school, and tests at a low proficiency level. A decision regarding the appropriateness of ALD eligibility and services will be made in consultation with many stakeholders, including parents, special education teachers, classroom teachers, the special education coordinator, and ALD staff. It is possible to qualify for both ALD and Special Education services.

The needs of some ALD students cannot be met by the ALD program alone. Excell Academy will closely monitor, via teacher observations, formal and informal assessment, teacher collaboration and consultation, and a collection of work samples, etc., the academic progress of each ALD student. Standard procedures for IEP (Individual Education Plan) assessment will be followed, in conjunction with the ALD team. Parents will be advised and their consent will be sought throughout the IEP process.

In the case of students with dual eligibility, the ALD and Special Education teams will coordinate to determine the best course of action. They will advise parents as to which services would best meet the needs of their child, and seek consent before altering instruction.

### **What do ALD teachers do?**

- Advocate for ELLs and their families
- Collaborate with content teachers to help all students access academic content
- Communicate the academic language growth of our students to families

Provide opportunities for students to:

- Practice oral and written Academic English

- ❑ Develop academic vocabulary to facilitate aural and text comprehension
- ❑ Develop background knowledge for deeper understanding of content and language

### **Declining ALD Services**

While we strongly recommend that students who are new to Academic English, or who have not demonstrated proficiency in Academic English, receive language support, parents do have the option of declining ALD services. To decline services, families must submit a written request for removal to the ALD department. Students will remain identified as LEP in MARSS until formally demonstrating proficiency and being exited by the ALD department in conjunction with content teachers.

All students identified as an ELL must take the ACCESS test, unless a parent declines the administration of that assessment. A written request must also be annually submitted to the ALD department in order to decline testing.

### **Transition Rate**

Research shows that it takes up to seven years to acquire enough Academic English for full-participation in the mainstream classroom. This time of language learning depends on individual student's effort, the student's level of language proficiency upon entry, and his/her previous exposure to school environments and academic language. Generally, the younger the student is, the shorter the duration of ELL support needed. ALD staff will consult with classroom teachers to ensure a smooth transition into the mainstream classroom.

## **Definition of Terms**

**ALD Academic Language Development** is English language development with a focus on "academic skills" and "academic content". It is the goal of Excell's language support program.

**BICS Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills** are often referred to as 'playground English' and are typically learned in 3 to 5 years. These language skills include basic, everyday speech that can be supported contextually through gestures.

**CALP Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency** is the level required by an ELL to understand academically challenging subject matter in a classroom setting. This refers to language that is often abstract, and is not accompanied by any contextual supports such as gestures or visual signals. It may take an ELL about 4 to 7 years to reach this level of fluency.

**EL English Learner** is the term most frequently used in reference to the learner, instructional program, and instructional expertise.

**ELL English Language Learner** is the term used at Excell Academy to refer to LEP students.

**ELD English Language Development** is the level at which an ELL student is proficient in Academic English. ELD levels range from Level 1 (Entering) to Level 6 (Reaching) as designated by WIDA.

**HLQ Home Language Questionnaire** is a questionnaire given to ALL students upon initial registration at Excell. The HLQ determines if a student first learned a language other than English, comes from a home where the language usually spoken is other than English, or usually speaks a language other than English. According to the Minnesota Dept. of Education, “a student who can answer yes to one or more of the questions above is considered to have a primary language other than English.” These students do not automatically receive ALD services. However, they are students who “should be screened to determine which students are English language learners (ELL) and which are not.”

**LEP Limited English Proficient** is the term used for federal classification recognized by the state of Minnesota in meeting the requirements for No Child Left Behind.

**WIDA World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment** is a consortium of states across the United States whose mission is to support academic language development and academic achievement for linguistically diverse students through high-quality standards and assessment. Program assessments, such as ACCESS and W-APT, were developed by WIDA.

### **State & District Assessments**

**ACCESS for ELLs Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners** is the assessment used by all Minnesota school districts to measure ELL proficiency with Academic English. ELL students are assessed in four language domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In calculating scores, greater emphasis is placed on reading and writing which are skills related to overall literacy and general academic achievement.

**FAST Formative Assessment System for Teachers** is a suite of assessment progress monitoring tools designed to help educators screen, monitor progress, and analyze the reading skills of students from kindergarten to fifth grade.

**MCA-II or -III Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment** is a state-mandated academic achievement test. All students, including ELLs, take the MCA in reading and math in grades 3-8, while students in grades 5-8 also take the MCA science test. The MCA is a standards-based test that measures specific skills defined for each grade by the state of Minnesota.

**MAP Measures of Academic Progress** is a measure used to assess student growth from fall to spring, as well as from one school year to another. All students in grades 1-8 take the MAP reading and MAP math tests in the fall, winter, and spring (first graders take MAP in the winter and spring).

**W-APT WIDA-ACCESS Placement Assessment** is a measure used to screen students who are new-to-country or who do not have ACCESS data from previous school years but whose HLQ indicate possible eligibility.