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## **Establishing Scope and Sequence for Newcomers and English Learners**

Tyler Robyn

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**Establishing Scope and Sequence for Newcomers and English Learners**

Tyler Robyn

Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa

**Abstract**

Research findings show that English Learners are the fastest growing subgroup in American public schools. It is the responsibility of the public schools to provide an appropriate and supportive education to these students. Past studies have also examined the history of English learners and the unique challenges they pose, newcomer programs, English learners' inclusion in the mainstream classroom, and strategies for teaching English learners. With research findings in mind, a school improvement plan was created to revise a current ESL program in a rural Iowa school district to increase student achievement in language acquisition and core content knowledge. This plan improves a current ESL program by creating a scope and sequence for newcomers and English learners, along with improving clarity and consistency for teachers and administration.

*Keywords:* scope and sequence, English learners, newcomer program, ESL program, curriculum planning, sheltered classroom

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### **Establishing Scope and Sequence for Newcomers and English Learners**

English Learners are often defined by students who have difficulties speaking, reading, writing, and understanding the English language and whose native language is not English (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). Approximately 10.3% of American public-school students are classified as English Learners (ELs), with ELS being the fastest growing subgroup in the U.S. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Many ELs entering American classrooms have very limited understanding of the English language (Short, 2022). To accommodate these students with limited English skills and little knowledge of the United States, many schools have created newcomer programs. Newcomer programs serve the purpose of helping non-native born students learn English, understand core concepts in other content areas, and learn about American culture (Short, 2002). The hope is that students can graduate from the newcomer program and successfully mainstream. The problem is that many schools do not have an established scope and sequence of classes and curriculum for newcomer and EL students. Schools will typically use a newcomer program to assimilate newcomers into the culture of the school and help students develop basic skills. Schools must better plan for these students once they have become comfortable with American culture and education, so that they can progress successfully towards graduation. A newcomer program can help students only so much if there is not a plan for these students once they leave the newcomer program.

The purpose of this school improvement plan is to address how schools can strategically establish a scope and sequence for their newcomer and EL students that will prepare students to be successful when mainstreaming. The Rock Valley Community School District currently has 43 students that qualify for the high school ELL program and 26 who qualify for the middle school program. Of these EL students, seven would be considered newcomers in the high school

and three in the middle school. The school improvement plan will address the need for assessing newcomer students upon arrival, placing students in the appropriate classes, clarifying curriculum in sheltered classes, and creating a progression of classes for newcomer and EL students as they progress in their mastery of content and the English language.

Research for this literature review used both Google Scholar and the DeWitt Library at Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa, to access scholarly journals. Most of the scholarly journals included in this literature review were published within the past ten years. The articles not from the past ten years, explained the history of EL students and newcomer programs in the United States, and while not recent in publication, they still add value to understanding the need for this school improvement plan. Research foci included newcomer programs and effective strategies for teaching EL students, particularly newcomer programs in middle schools and high schools, as the focus of the school improvement plan is for grades 6-12. The scope of research also included studies involving elementary and postsecondary settings. This exploration allowed me to determine strategies that were helpful for English Learners and newcomer students, and also consider the unique challenges these students face.

Three areas of research proved especially beneficial for creating a scope and sequence for newcomers and EL students: 1.) the history of English Learners and newcomer programs, 2.) the unique challenges these students face, and 3.) the successful strategies for teaching English learners to help them be successful. By examining the history and challenges faced by English Learners in addition to what strategies work well with these students, Rock Valley Community Schools can establish a consistent scope and sequence for newcomers and English Learners as they progress through middle school and high school. Creating a consistent program with an

established scope and sequence will provide teachers at Rock Valley Consolidated School District (RVCSD) with clarity for how English Learners and newcomer students can progress.

The literature review is organized by key themes deemed effective in designing a scope and sequence for newcomers and English Learners. The literature review begins with the history and statistics of newcomer students and English Learners in America. Following are different models used for newcomer and ELL programs. Next, the literature review explains the unique challenges faced by newcomers and English Learners inside and outside of the classroom. Lastly, the literature review describes effective strategies for teaching English Learners and newcomer students.

### **Review of the Literature**

To design a scope and sequence for English learners and newcomer students at Rock Valley Community Schools, it was important to analyze data, studies, and information regarding this population. The studies in this Literature Review cover the history and statistics of ESL students in the United States, the unique challenges English learners face, inclusion and language models for EL students, and teaching strategies to best serve English learners.

### **History and Statistics of EL Students in the United States**

Today's classrooms in the United States are full of diversity. There are many different kinds of students with each student having their own unique set of experiences, strengths, and challenges. In addition to the many different types of students, there are also many different groups of students. The group of students that is growing the fastest in American classrooms are English Learners (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). If schools want to provide English Learners with adequate support and resources, then they first must consider the history of these students.



According to Every Student Succeeds Act and the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, English Learners refer to students who have “difficulties in speaking reading, writing, or understanding the English Language (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). The difficulties must be sufficient enough to deny the individual the ability to meet the state academic standards, successfully achieve in classrooms where the language instruction is in English, or participate fully in society. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 requires public schools to help English Learner students participate meaningfully and equally in an educational program (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). ESL programs were established to help English Learners acclimate to the culture of the United States and support their learning of the English language. Even with this support, Barrow and Markman-Pithers (2016) showed that the graduation rate for English learner students was 61% in 2012-2013, compared with an overall US graduation rate of 81%. Public schools are providing support for EL students, but improvement is still needed to help these students achieve to the same level as their native-born peers. The effects of students’ abilities to learn English go beyond the classroom. A person who speaks English poorly earns roughly 33% less than one who speaks English well (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). Despite the introduction of ESL programs, there still exists a large need in U.S. public-school systems to support the needs of EL students.

The number of ESL students in American classrooms is continuing to grow. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2023), the number of English Learners has increased from 4.5 million students in 2010 to 5 million students in 2020. As of 2020, English Learners represent 10.3% of the total population of students in the United States’ public school system (National Center of Education Statistics, 2023). There are more English Learners in

elementary schools than in middle or high schools due to students graduating out of ESL programs and no longer needing ESL services. Spanish is the most common language spoken by English Learners with 75.5% having Spanish as their native language (National Center of Education Statistics, 2023). The National Center of Education (2023) reports that 77.1% of EL students are Hispanic, 10.2% are Asian, 6.3% are White, and 4.2% are Black. English Learners are most common in cities, but are growing in all areas.

Johnson (2023) conducted a longitudinal study across 31 states to investigate the achievement levels of EL students. Participants consisted of 56,000 students across the United States from 915 schools. Johnson conducted the research over the course of five years. The quantitative research compared the results of never-ELs, always-ELs, and ever-ELs (students who at one point were in an ESL program). Students completed Measure of Academic Performance (MAP) testing where they were assessed on their knowledge of reading and math. Johnson (2023) showed that never-ELs consistently scored the highest in both math and reading, followed by ever-ELs, always-ELs, and lastly, students dually identified as special education and EL students. For math, the achievement gap between the national average and the average for ever-ELs and always-EL shrank every year (Johnson, 2023). By third grade, ever-ELs were performing higher than the national average in math. In reading, however, the achievement gap between ever-ELs and always-ELs and the national average grew every year (Johnson, 2023). In both subjects, all three EL groups grew more throughout the year than never-EL students, but all three EL groups lost more learning during the summer than their never-EL peers (Johnson, 2023). Johnson (2023) suggests that EL students are able to grow quickly and close the achievement gap between them and their peers when they are provided with the proper support.

A subgroup of the EL population in the United States are newcomers. Due to the influx of English Learners coming to the United States, many schools began to create newcomer programs. Newcomer programs service students who recently moved to the United States and have very limited knowledge of the English language. Students who qualify for a newcomer program often have larger language needs than the general EL population. The purpose of newcomer programs is to help students learn English, teach basic core concepts, and guide students on the culture of the United States (Short, 2002).

Short (2002) conducted research over newcomer programs as an educational alternative for EL students. The study consisted of 115 newcomer programs in middle school and high school settings across 29 states. There were more than 15,000 students who participated in the four-year study. The study consisted of a nationwide survey that looked at features of newcomer programs and program design. Short's (2002) research found that 97% of the programs offer core content taught through the use of electives, sheltered classrooms, or bilingual education. The research also showed that many newcomer students gain more than one grade level of growth over the course of the school year (Short, 2002). Much like the findings of Johnson (2023), Short (2002) concluded that ESL and newcomer programs are beneficial in helping students close the achievement gap between EL students and their peers. With proper supports, English Learners are able to gain content knowledge, learn language skills, acclimate to the culture of the United States, and compete with their native-born peers (Short, 2002).

### **Unique Challenges Faced by EL Students**

Palacios et al. (2020) conducted a survey to investigate the unique challenges and risks that newcomer EL students faced when entering American public schools. The year-long study took a mixed methods approach to monitor the lives of 122 newcomer students in two West

Coast public schools. The participants were newcomer students who had recently migrated to the United States from various regions of Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras. All of the participants had migrated to the United States within the past five years. Palacios et al. (2020) conducted qualitative interviews and used quantitative, self-report data to investigate the common immigration-related risk factors of newcomer students. Their findings show that economic and language challenges can create significant adjustment problems (Palacios et al., 2020). Many of the participants' families came to the United States to seek a better life. Economic factors posed the broadest ranging risks. Economic challenges commonly faced by the participants included students needing to work as a way to support their families, tougher living situations, and overcrowded housing (Palacios et al., 2020). The need for family members to work long hours also caused many of the adolescent girls to take on maternal roles for their family. Palacios et al. (2020) also found that language challenges caused many adolescents to internalize their problems, causing them to feel isolated and outside the mainstream. Economic and language challenges led to negative outcomes for the participants. Palacios et al. (2020) concluded that it is critical for school personnel to consider the unique challenges these students face when working with newcomers.

Hos (2020) looked into the lives and aspirations of immigrant students at a high school on the East Coast of the United States. Hos (2020) completed a year-long study of 19 immigrant students ranging in age from 13 to 18. The students were studied through observations, audio and visual recordings of their classrooms, students work documents, and student interviews. Hos found that EL students are at an increased risk of being students with interrupted formal education (SIFE) (Hos, 2020). SIFE are identified as students who speak a different language and are at least two grades behind their peers. The study also found that English learning SIFE

are at an increased risk of dropping out (Hos, 2020). The research of Palacios et al. (2020) is supported by the research of Hos (2020), both showing that immigrant EL students face many challenges due to language difficulties and responsibilities outside of school. Hos (2020) expressed the need for ESL and newcomer programs to help newcomer students assimilate to life in America and help students learn English to reduce the language challenges they face when coming to the United States.

Of the English learners we have in the United States, 70% are of Mexican descent (de Souza, 2010). The Education Commission of the States (2010) reports that 36% of the foreign-born population comes from Mexico and Central America. Consequently, it is important to understand the schooling that these students received in Mexico. de Souza (2010) conducted a study to examine the instructional strategies in Mexico and the effect these strategies have on Mexican English learners in the United States. De Souza observed classrooms at five different schools in Guadalajara, Mexico for twelve days. These differences in classroom styles de Souza observed contribute to Mexican immigrant students struggle to adjust to American classrooms. Their findings show that Mexican immigrant students struggle because they are tasked with the pressures of learning a new language and mastering grade-level content (de Souza, 2010). Similar to Palacios et al. (2020), de Souza (2010) reports that immigrant EL students feel isolated or out of place because teachers and peers don't understand or acknowledge their cultures and backgrounds. As Hispanics are the fastest growing minority in the United States, it is important that American teachers draw on these students' background and experiences to enhance their academic development (de Souza, 2010).

### **Inclusion and Language Models for EL Students**

There are conflicting beliefs about the best practices as to inclusion of English learners in the mainstream classes. The main two approaches are immersion or bilingual education. In full immersion, EL students are integrated into the mainstream classrooms and are expected to learn the content material and language by being in the same room as their native-born peers. In bilingual education, EL students are pulled out of some regular classes to receive services in both English and their native language. Barrow and Markman-Pithers (2016) completed a study comparing the two types of strategies. They completed a nationwide data review of more than 4,930,000 EL students from 2004 until 2014. The purpose of their study was to determine which model was most beneficial for EL students. According to Barrow and Markman-Pithers (2016), research shows conflicting results of English immersion and bilingual education models, leaving researchers uncertain of the best approach. The research did show that bilingual education was better for young students in preschool and early elementary, but was inconclusive as students progressed in school (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). A major finding of this study showed that classroom quality and having teachers trained in the right areas is the most important key to helping EL students grow. Classroom quality was more important than language or instruction (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). When schools are deciding what method of teaching, they would like to have for their EL students, the school must consider what their ultimate goal for their EL students is. Schools must consider whether the goal is to help English learners students become truly bilingual or to help them become proficient in the English language (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016).

Staubhaar (2021) researched the language ideologies used in classrooms and their effects on newcomer students. In a six-month study, Staubhaar used classroom observations and semi-structured interviews to examine the language ideologies of different teachers at a central Texas

high school. The study included 14 newcomer students from Mexico and eight different teachers. The high school was an “English-only” high school where all instruction and conversations were supposed to be in English. Despite being an “English-only” high school, teachers had different ideologies and managed their classrooms in different ways. The amount of Spanish allowed in the classroom varied from teacher to teacher and classroom to classroom. Observations showed that Spanish was often allowed in the classroom when it dealt with the classwork and was within the classroom norms. Some teachers allowed Spanish for reteaching. In contrast, other teachers allowed only English under all circumstances.

Staubhaar’s (2021) findings revealed that in an “English-only” school, many teachers were contradictory in their actions in the classroom causing confusion for what was okay for newcomer students. Students who spoke Spanish relied on each other and speaking Spanish to get the support needed to do well in their classes. The research shows that students needed some level of support in their own language even in an “English-only” high school. These findings support the findings of Barrow & Markman-Pithers (2016), showing how the language of instruction is not what is most important. Instead, the most important factor in helping EL students be successful is classroom quality.

Short’s (2002) research into the use of newcomer programs as alternative education showed the effects newcomer programs have on student achievement. When examining over 15,000 students in 115 programs, Short found that many different models were used for newcomer programs. The programs observed included newcomer programs within a school, separate site programs, and newcomer only schools. The findings showed that 77% of the programs were newcomer programs located within a school. 97% of the programs offer core content areas though the use of electives, sheltered classrooms, or bilingual classrooms (Short,

2002). Very few programs were exactly alike, but each school had to adapt their program to the needs of their school. Short's research supports the findings of Barrow & Markman-Pithers (2016) and Staubhaar (2021). The language used and specifics of the program are not what is most important in helping EL students achieve. Instead, the focus should be on creating high-quality classrooms with highly qualified teachers. Classroom quality is the most important factor in the achievement levels of EL students.

### **Successful Strategies for Teaching EL Students**

Research has shown that highly effective classrooms are more influential on EL students' achievement levels than the language of instruction. It is important to consider the strategies and activities that make classrooms highly effective. In the late 1990s, Freeman & Freeman (2001) studied the best strategies for effectively teaching ESL and newcomer students. Freeman & Freeman observed 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students in a rural school in California. In the ESL classroom, Freeman & Freeman were looking to investigate the effects of routines, expectations, and other strategies had on student achievement. The findings showed that EL students benefit from structure, expectations, and routines. Routines and expectations are especially beneficial for ESL students because it gives them a sense of security when they are experiencing culture shock (Freeman & Freeman, 2001). Other strategies that Freeman & Freeman (2001) found to be beneficial for ESL students included relating content to the students' background knowledge, teaching relevant and engaging material, and organizing content around a theme. Due to the challenges of adjusting to a new culture, these strategies offer students a sense of stability in the classroom.

In a separate study, He and Thompson (2022) investigated the effect that parent involvement had on the achievement levels of ESL students. Over the course of one year, the



researchers completed meta-analysis of observations and a synthetic review of previous studies and data. The studies included 6,651 EL students ranging in ages from kindergarten to grade 12. The purpose of the study was to examine the effects parent involvement had on student achievement and socioemotional health. The findings showed that a majority of students identified positive outcomes in both academic achievement levels and socioemotional domains when there was increased family involvement (He & Thompson, 2022).

The strongest association between family involvement and children's outcomes were found when parents/caregivers had high educational expectations (He & Thompson, 2022). Family involvement in education was most effective for early ages, but all age groups showed positive outcomes from family involvement. He & Thompson (2022) also noted that newcomer students especially need family involvement in their education to help students better acclimate to the new culture and school. The findings support the work of Freeman & Freeman (2001). Both studies emphasize a need for high expectations for EL students and helping EL students acclimate to the new culture of the school.

Hos et al. (2019) conducted research over the capital gained by students in newcomer programs. The study took place at a high school in the Northeast United States. Hos et al. (2019) wanted to see what content students learned in a newcomer program and the shortcomings of the program. Nineteen newcomer students were involved in the study, which took place over one year. The findings showed that school structure and systems tailored to the unique needs of newcomer students plays a major role in the achievement level of the students. One of the most effective practices is having teachers explicitly teach the rules of the games (Hos et al., 2019).

Teachers must be very clear in teaching students the culture of the school. The research also showed that keeping students away from the mainstream classrooms hindered newcomers'

ability to learn the culture. Establishing routines and teaching respect and trust were cornerstones in helping students learn culture and improve their academic achievement levels (Hos et al., 2019). Hos et al. supports the findings of Freeman and Freeman (2001), showing the need for schools to have high expectations and establish routines for ESL students to help them succeed. In addition to establishing routines and expectations, helping ESL students learn culture is key to their development.

LaCosse et al. (2020) looked at the effect that social-belonging intervention had on students. The project had 2,600 first-year college students from across the U.S. complete surveys about social-belonging interventions. The findings showed that social-belonging intervention improved student performance (LaCosse et al., 2020). Social belonging was also found to have a larger effect on ESL students than the general population. Social belonging played a major role in students' performance and persistence in STEM courses. Student groups who greatly benefited from social belonging included students with low socio-economic status, first-generation immigrants, and racial/ethnic minorities (LaCosse et al., 2020). These findings support the belief that students must have a sense of belonging to perform and achieve. This work supports the findings of Freeman and Freeman (2021) and He and Thompson (2019), displaying the needs for setting high expectations and teaching culture to ESL students.

Many strategies are found to be effective in helping ESL students achieve and grow. Language of instruction is not the most important factor in student achievement; instead, high quality classrooms have the highest effect on student achievement (Staubhaar, 2016). Research shows that creating routines, setting high expectations, teaching students culture, and creating a sense of belonging are all effective strategies in supporting EL students.

## **Site Profile**

### **Community Characteristics**

The elementary, middle, and high school for RVCSD are all located in the town of Rock Valley, Iowa. In addition to the public school, Rock Valley is home to Rock Valley Christian and the Netherlands Reformed Christian School. According to the 2021 U.S. Census, 4,018 people live in Rock Valley. Of the people living in Rock Valley, 72% are White and 28% are Hispanic. The percentage of people who are Hispanic in Rock Valley is over four times the state average of 6% (*Census Reporter*, 2021). Rock Valley is a fairly affluent community with a poverty rate of only 3.1%, well below the state average of 11% (*Census Reporter*, 2021). The average household income is around \$59,000. In Rock Valley, 7.3% of the population is foreign born. Of this population, 95% were born somewhere in Latin America (*Census Reporter*, 2021). The foreign-born population has an impact on the languages that are spoken in homes. Of children between the ages of 5-17, 29% speak Spanish at home (*Census Reporter*, 2021). Due to high number of Latin-born residents and children who speak Spanish, there is a big need for RVCSD to provide English as a Second Language resources.

### **District Characteristics**

The school district has one campus that houses all three school buildings: an elementary, middle, and high school. Of the students attending RVCSD, 58.2% are white, 39.8% are Hispanic, and 2% are other ethnicities or multi-racial. Male students make up 53.7% of the population and females make up the remaining 46.3%. English Learners are 21.6% of the overall population. Besides the common core classes, students are able to take electives in areas such as business, Spanish, music, art, family and consumer sciences, and agriculture. Students are also allowed to take online courses for college credit through Northwest Iowa Community College in Sheldon, Iowa. In addition to the regular classroom, Rock Valley CSD also offers sheltered classes for English Learners at the high school levels. Sheltered classes are offered in math, history, science, and English.

### **School District's Mission and Vision**

The mission of Rock Valley CSD is “Providing all students with educational opportunities to achieve their optimum potential in a global society.” It is the belief of the Rock Valley CSD that all students are capable learners and the district will do all it can to set up each student for future successes.

The school motto for RVCSD is “Educating today’s student for tomorrow” (Rock Valley CSD, 2023).

The motto sheds light on the vision of the district, showing the importance of preparing students for success in their future endeavors. In addition to preparing students academically, Rock Valley CSD also puts an emphasis on character development. The five pillars that RVCSD stands for are honesty, grit, responsibility, respect, and you matter (Rock Valley CSD, 2023).

### **Learning Goals and Educational Objectives**

Rock Valley CSD is committed to educating students and helping them develop into quality producers, effective communicators, complex thinkers, collaborative community contributors, self-directed learners, and knowledgeable persons (Rock Valley CSD). The long-term academic goals for the district are centered around students’ performance on the state assessments. In the future, RVCSD would like to see 95% of K-12 students be proficient on the state assessments in the areas of science, math, and ELA (Rock Valley CSD, 2023). In order to reach these lofty goals, Rock Valley CSD is committed to providing high-quality education and ample resources and opportunities for all students to succeed.

### **Parent Involvement**

At Rock Valley CSD, parents are able to stay informed through access to Infinite Campus, a student information management system, and Google Classroom. Teachers are able to post information, announcements, and resources via these electronic tools. Teachers are also encouraged to stay in contact with parents through email and phone calls. Parents are participate in activities such as school board, music boosters, and sports boosters. Rock Valley CSD also offers parents an opportunity to communicate with parents by attending parent-teacher conferences. Parent-teacher conferences occur twice a year, once in the fall and again in the spring. Parents can sign up for in-person conferences, phone conferences, or Zoom calls. Lastly, parents can stay informed through the school website and social media sites. Parents are instrumental in helping students achieve their goals. Parent and teacher communication is a vital resource for all involved.

### **School ELL and Newcomer Program Characteristics**

Due to the high number of students for whom English is not their first language, Rock Valley CSD is focused on providing services to English Learners. Of the overall population at Rock Valley CSD, 21.6% are English learners (*U.S. News & World Report, 2023*). There are currently 28 middle school students and 45 high school students classified as English learners. These students range drastically in their ability to speak, listen, write, and read English. In the 2023-2024 school year, Rock Valley Middle School has only one ESL teacher and the high school has two ESL teachers. Due to the high number of students that qualify for the ESL program but limited teachers, many of the upper-level ESL students do not receive services. Instead, the focus of the ESL program is primarily on the students with low knowledge of English and the newcomers.

Each year all English learners are assessed on their abilities to read, write, listen, and speak English. Rock Valley uses the English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA) to test EL students. Students are given a score of 1-5 based on their ability, 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. Most of the students who score in the range of 1-3 receive pull-out services in the ESL classroom. Unfortunately, many students who score in the 4-5 range do not receive support from the ESL program and are placed in the mainstream classrooms without any additional support.

In addition to the support and pull-out classes provided by the ESL teachers, Rock Valley High School also offers sheltered classes. Sheltered classes are offered in the contents of math, science, ELA, and history. The goal of the sheltered class is to teach students the basic concepts of the subject, learn academic language, and support students in their English language acquisition. The sheltered classes are taught by regular classroom teachers with the support of an ESL teacher in the room. These classes usually consist of 5-15 students who are classified as newcomers. The lessons are taught in English with Spanish support when possible. Currently, the content taught is completely determined by the teacher, providing little consistency. After students have graduated from the sheltered classes, the idea is for the students to join the regular classroom with their peers.

### **School Performance**

Rock Valley Community School District is a public school that services the town of Rock Valley, Iowa. Rock Valley is a rural town in Northwest Iowa. In the 2022-2023 school year, there were 948 students in prekindergarten through grade 12 at RVCSD. The elementary school serves grades prekindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade and provides schooling to 481 students. There were 179 students in the middle school and 288 students in the high school. According to the *U.S. News & World Report* in the 2022-2023 school year, 58.3% of high school students and 76.2% of middle school students were proficient in mathematics at RVCSD. For English Language Arts, 72% of high school students and 82.5% of middle school students tested proficient. The high school's overall performance was acceptable, and the middle school's performance was commendable. Due to the performance of English Learners, the high school was designated as targeted by the Iowa Board of Education and will receive ESSA support.

### **Teacher Instructional Strategies and SIOP**

Due to the number of students at RVCSD who are English learners, the focus of professional development for the staff has been on providing supports for these learners in the general classroom. All teachers at RVCSD are trained on how to implement Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP). SIOP is a research-based and validated instructional model that has proven effective in addressing the academic needs of English learners throughout the United States (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2023). The focus for teachers is on content and language objectives, strategies, and building background. SIOP is used at RVCSD because it is proven to be effective for all learners, especially English learners. Each Wednesday, staff participate in professional development for one hour after school. The focus has been on implementing teacher tools for student engagement, SIOP strategies, and building meetings.

### **ESSA Targeted School Plan**

As a result of the Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress scores in the spring of 2022, Rock Valley is a targeted school in the area of English Learners. Administration, instructional coaches, and a committee of teachers met with district AEA members to come up with a plan to improve student scores for English learners. After multiple meetings, the team came up with a plan to focus its efforts on helping students who scored four and five on the ELPA test to meet state proficiency standards, as they

were seen as the students who could most easily meet the standards. To help these students meet standards, teachers were instructed to focus on literacy in the classroom. Focusing on literacy will help all students and should help English learners score higher on the ISASP.

### **Needs Assessment**

Over the years, the number of English Learners continues to increase at Rock Valley CSD. As of the 2023 school year, 21.6% of the overall population at Rock Valley CSD are considered English learners (*U.S. News & World Report, 2023*). It is important that our curriculum and instruction adapts to the needs of these students. There are many ways that Rock Valley CSD can improve the curriculum for English Learners. To improve the instruction and curriculum for EL students and newcomers, the middle and high school must administer appropriate testing, create and teach consistent curriculum in sheltered classes, and establish a scope and sequence of classes for English learners and newcomer students.

The first need that must be addressed is the testing process for our newcomers and English Learners. It is imperative that these students are placed in the appropriate classes based on their cognitive ability and English language skills. The current practices of RVCSD tests newcomer and EL students only on their ability to read, speak, listen, and write using the English language. This is helpful for knowing whether students can attend regular classes with their English-speaking peers, but these tests don't give an accurate description of where students are at academically. Not all EL and newcomer students come into school with a solid educational background. Many students are multiple grades behind grade level when they arrive. Research has shown that many newcomers and English learners are able to make big leaps forward in their education when provided appropriate supports. Many of these students grow more than one grade level in a calendar year. (Short, 2002) Short (2002) has shown that these students have the ability to learn quickly, but these students must have a base knowledge from which to work. For this reason, we cannot place these students in the mainstream classroom if they don't have the background knowledge to achieve. Proper testing must be done to set students up for success.

Another area of need for our EL students is to have a consistent curriculum in their sheltered classes. At the moment, teachers of the sheltered classes create their own curriculum. There are not set

standards that must be covered in these classes, so teachers end up picking and choosing what they find appropriate for the students in their class. There is not much of a scope or sequence for these classes, so the content learned in these classes can be disjointed. For schools to help their English learners be as successful as possible, schools should seek to provide grade-level instruction while also helping them learn English (Hos et al., 2019). To provide grade-level instruction, Rock Valley must require the curriculum in sheltered classrooms to follow statewide standards. The sheltered classes need a set curriculum so that future teachers can know what has been taught and the skill sets that students who took sheltered classes will have when they advance to the next class. In addition, having sheltered classes create a consistent curriculum will allow teachers to know what has been taught previously if students move in after the school year has started. Teachers who provide additional support and resources can help students learn the material that was taught previously, so students who move in late can keep up with the other students in the class.

Finally, another need that Rock Valley middle and high school must address is creating a sequence and progression for newcomers and EL students as they progress in their development of academic content and understanding of the English language. Currently, there is not a set progression for classes for students who are in the ESL and newcomer program. This gap causes teachers and administration to meet every year to figure out what classes need to be offered, decide where to place different students, create new curriculum, and ask different teachers to teach new classes. Every year there is a reset.

Instead, Rock Valley middle and high school needs to set up a scope and sequence for the EL students and newcomers. Creating a consistent scope and sequence will provide stability to the ESL and newcomer program. Teachers will know what they need to teach and be able to create appropriate curriculum. Administration will have a much easier time placing students in classes as they will follow a natural progression from year to year rather than guessing what classes students need next. Scope and sequence for English learners is imperative for helping these students graduate. As of 2013, only 61% of English learners in the U.S. graduate from high school (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). A consistent



scope and sequence will also provide clarity for the students and the parents of students as they will know what the progression of their classes will be and what they must do to graduate.

### **Data Analysis**

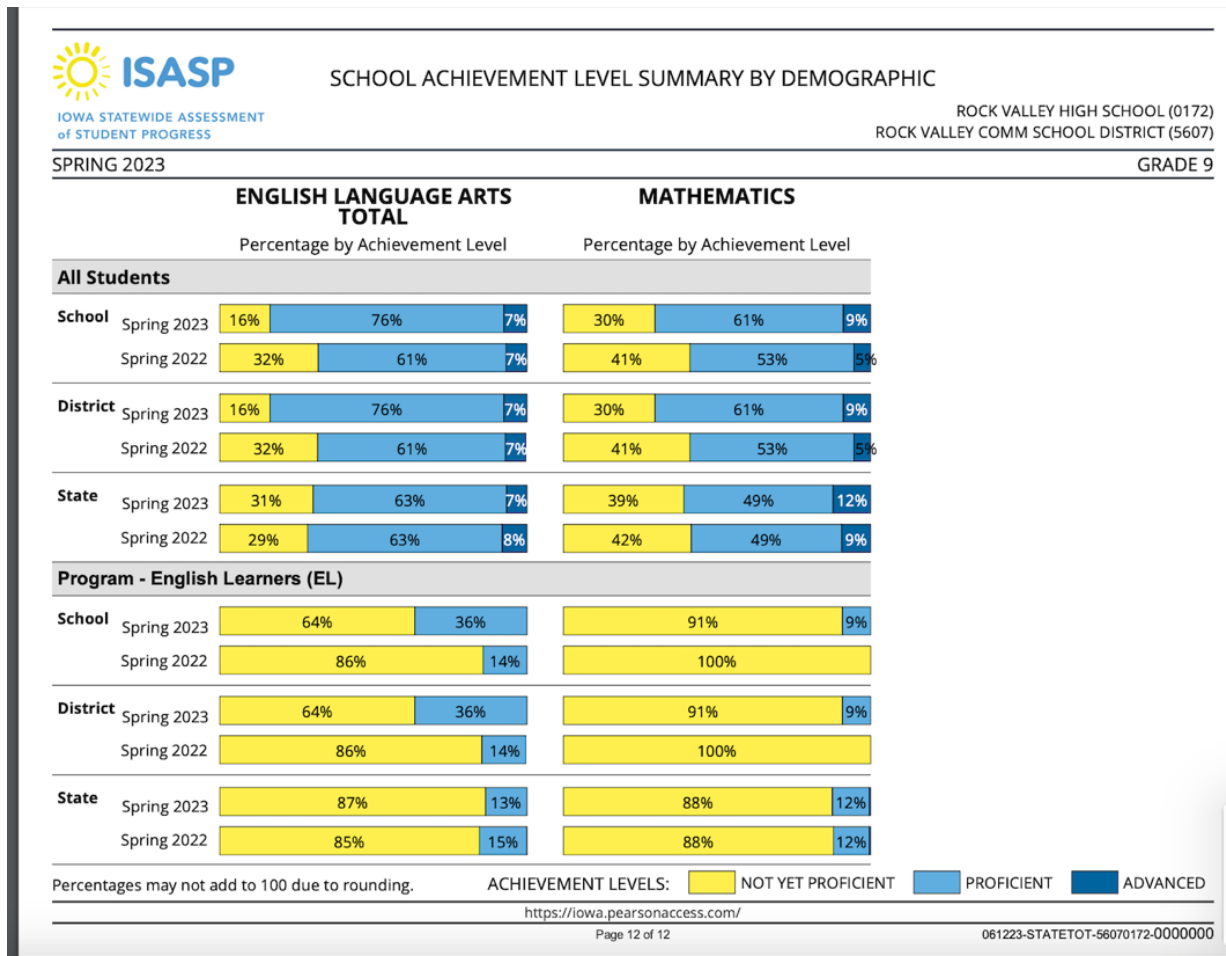
#### **Data Summary**

Every year students at Rock Valley CSD are required to take the ISASP. This statewide standards-based test assesses students' ability in mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA). For select grades, students are also assessed in science. Figures 1-3 (shown below) show the performance of English Learners compared to the rest of the students at Rock Valley High School. The data also shows how these learners compare to the rest of the district and state.

Figure 1 shows that 36% of 9<sup>th</sup> grade EL students were proficient in ELA in 2023. This is an improvement from the previous year as only 14% of the students were proficient in 2022. Growth was also shown in mathematics as the number of EL students testing proficiently in math grew from 0% in 2022 to 8% in 2023. The percentage of EL students testing proficiently in both subjects is much lower than the general population. In comparison to the rest of the state, ELA proficiency numbers are much better than the state average. Meanwhile, the percent proficient in math for ELs are similar to the state average.

**Figure 1**

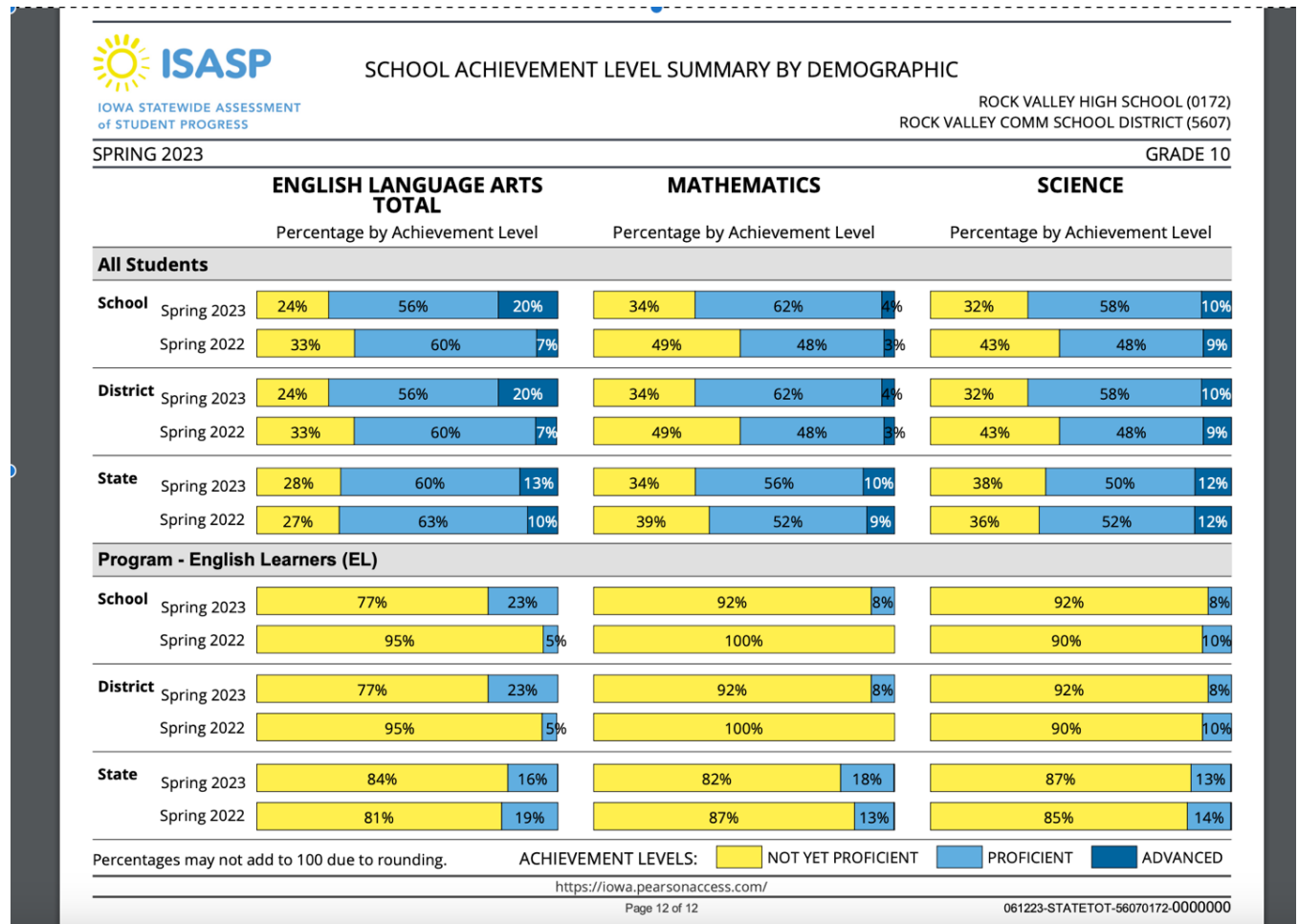
*Grade 9 EL ISASP Scores*



The data below in Figure 2 shows the results of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade EL students at Rock Valley on the ISASP. Of the EL students in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, 23% tested proficient in ELA, 8% in mathematics, and 8% in science. The percentage of EL students testing proficient in ELA was 7% higher than the state average. On the other hand, Rock Valley EL students tested worse than the state average in the subjects of mathematics and science. The data showed that there was growth over the course of the year in the percentage of EL students testing proficient in mathematics and ELA, but there was a slight decrease in the percentage testing proficiently in science.

**Figure 2**

*Grade 10 EL ISASP Scores*

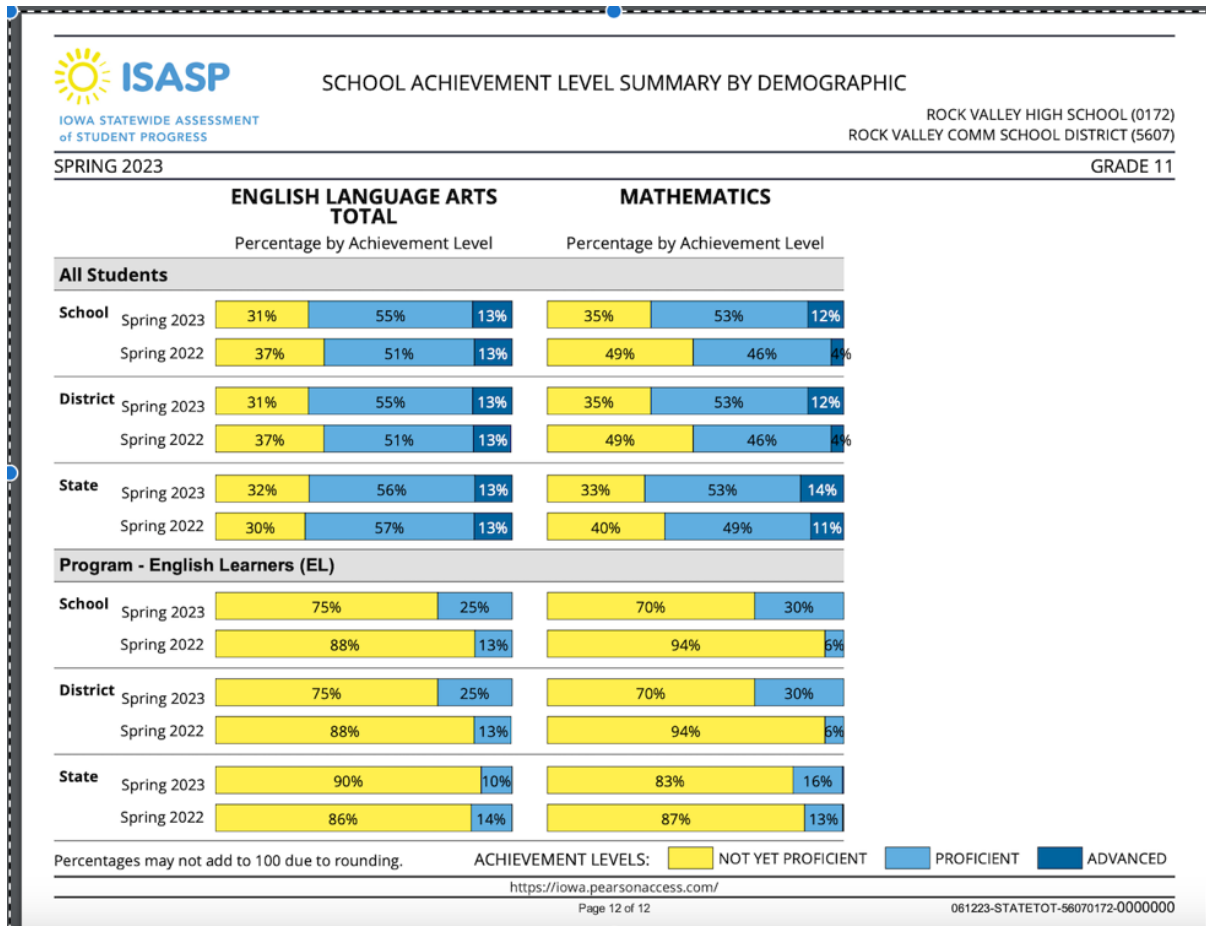


The data below in Figure 3 shows that 25% of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade EL students at Rock Valley tested proficiently in ELA, and 30% of these students tested proficiently in mathematics. Both numbers are almost double the state averages. The data also shows significant growth in the number of EL students testing proficiently in both subjects from 2022 to 2023. Figure 3 (below) shows that the percentage proficient in ELA increased from 13% in 2022 to 25% in 2023. There was an even larger increase in the percentage testing proficient in mathematics. Only 5% of 11<sup>th</sup> grade EL students were proficient in mathematics in 2022, but the percentage increased to five times that amount in 2023 with 30% of students demonstrating proficiency. The percentage of EL students demonstrating proficiency in both subjects is

still below the average of the general population, but EL students experienced more growth than their peers.

**Figure 3**

*Grade 11 EL IASP Scores*

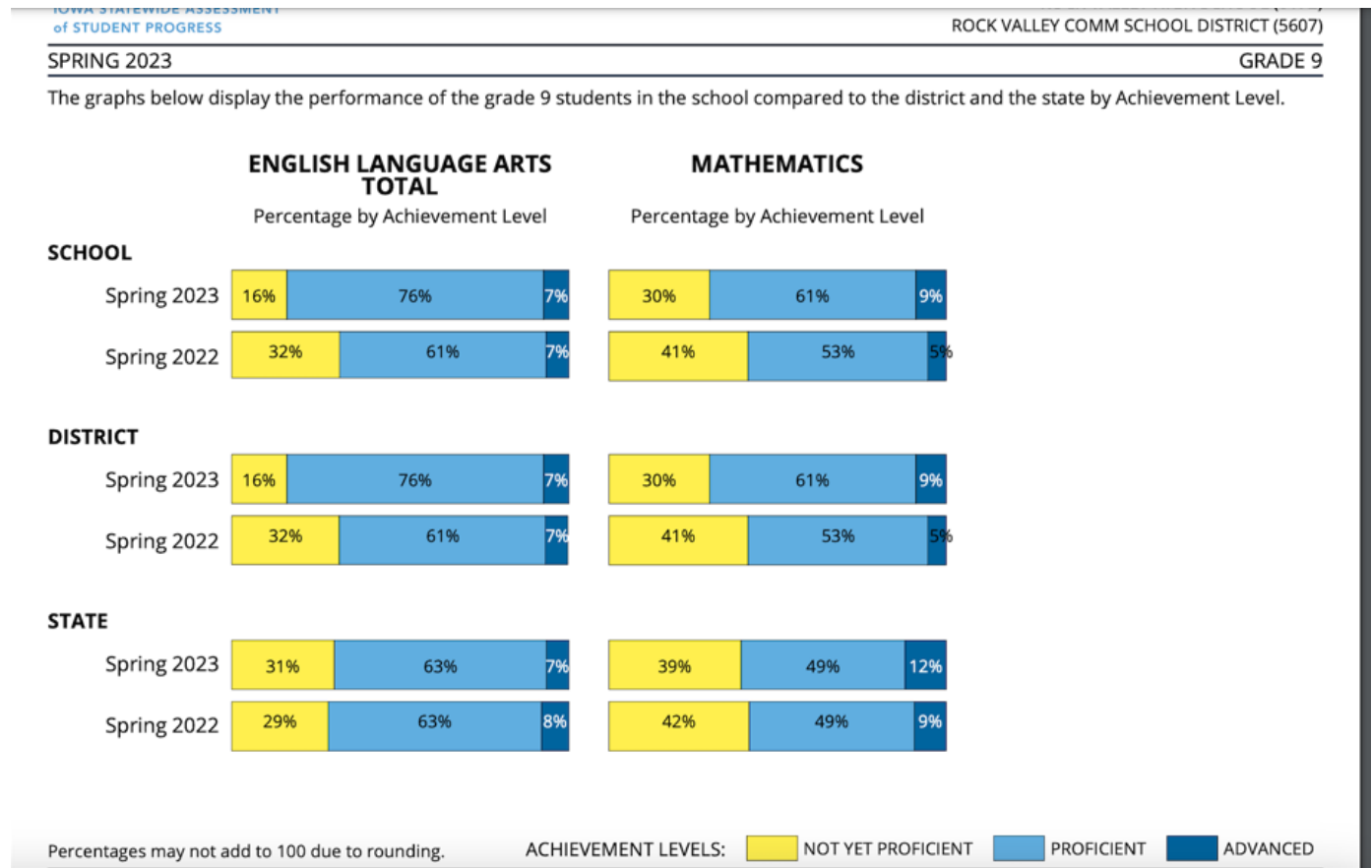


The data in Figure 4 (below) shows the overall scores of students in grade 9 at Rock Valley High School. Rock Valley has a higher percentage of students who are proficient and a smaller percentage of students not yet proficient in both subjects compared to the state average. In 2023, 83% of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students demonstrated proficiency or were advanced in ELA, and 70% were proficient or advanced in mathematics. The data also shows growth in the percentage of students testing proficient in both subjects from 2022 to 2023. Despite having a higher percentage of students testing proficient in both ELA and mathematics, Rock Valley had a smaller percentage of 9<sup>th</sup> graders in the advanced level compared to the

state average. The data in Figure 4 shows trends moving in the right direction, but Rock Valley could do more to help more students reach the advanced level.

**Figure 4**

*Overall Grade 9 IASP Scores*

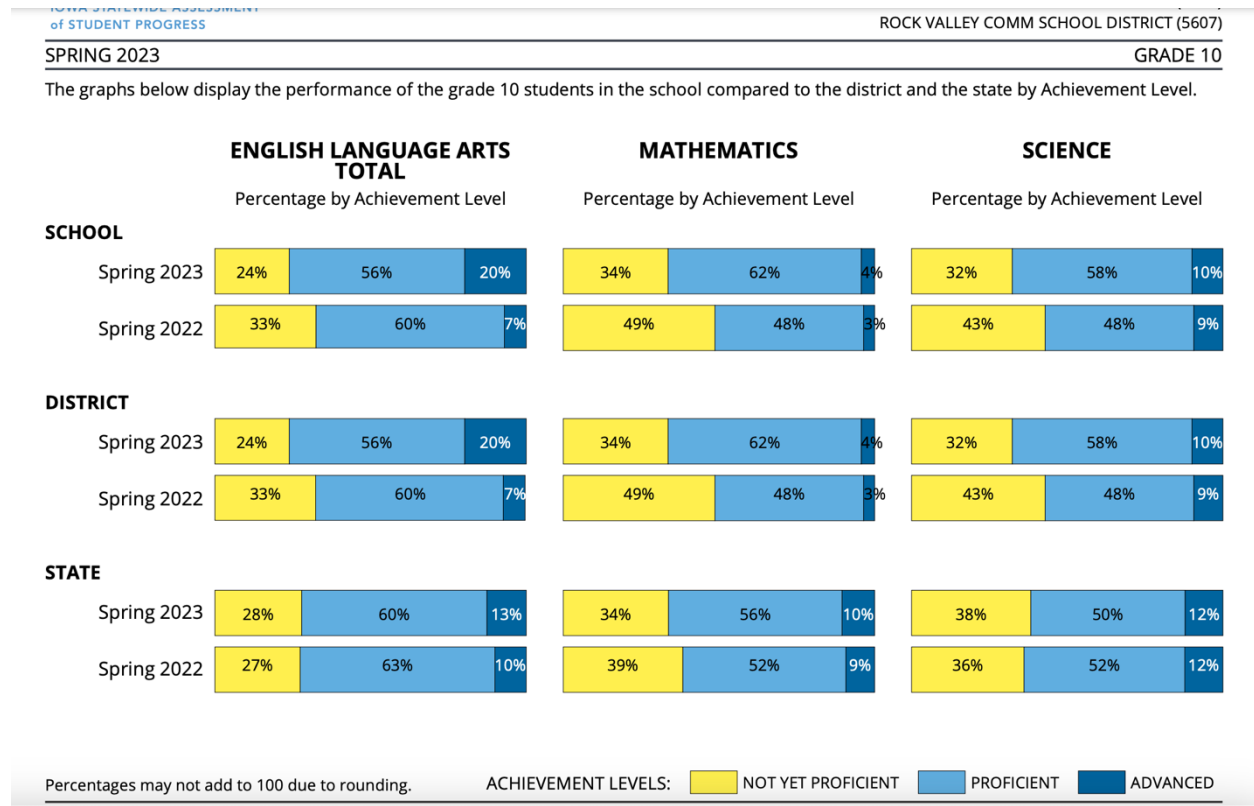


The data in Figure 5 (below) shows that overall 10<sup>th</sup> grade students at Rock Valley test better than the state average. In ELA, 76% of the students are proficient or advanced, 66% in math, and 68% in science. All of these figures are at or exceed the state average. Rock Valley 10<sup>th</sup> grade students tested especially well in ELA with 20% reaching the advanced level and only 24% not yet proficient. The students tested well in the other subject areas but did not have as many students reach the advanced level in mathematics or science. The 10<sup>th</sup> grade students demonstrated growth over the course of a year across all subject areas with a higher percentage testing proficient or advanced in all three domains. The largest

growth was seen in mathematics with a growth of 14% more students testing proficient and 15% fewer students scoring at the not yet proficient level.

**Figure 5**

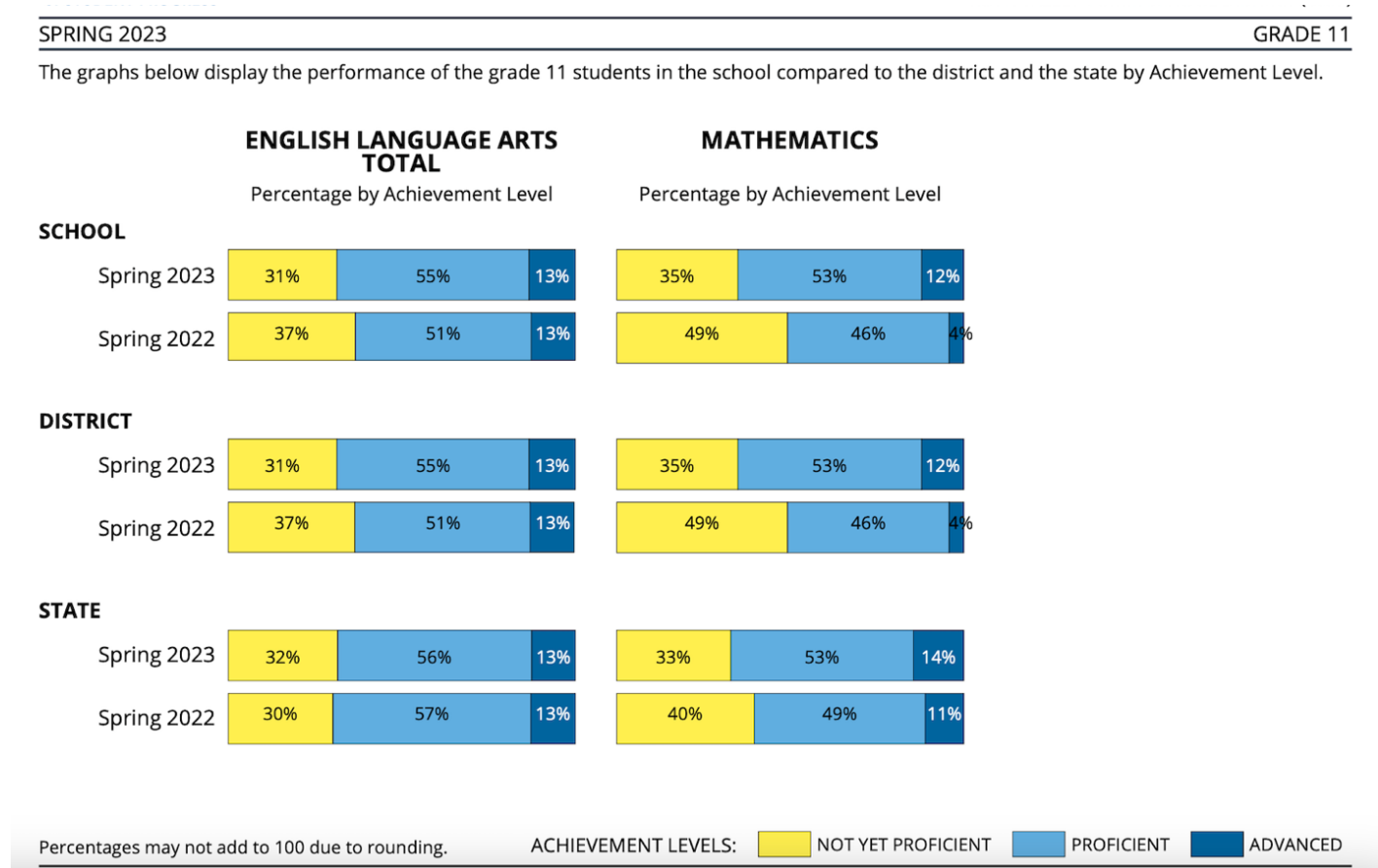
*Overall Grade 10 ISASP Scores*



The data s in Figure 6 shows that the 11<sup>th</sup> grade students at Rock Valley tested almost identically to the state average on the ISASP in 2023. Of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade students, only 31% were not yet proficient in ELA and 35% were not yet proficient in mathematics. Figure 6 (below) shows that the percentage of students testing proficiently in ELA increased from 51% in 2022 to 55% in 2023. Students also showed significant growth in mathematics. The percentage of students testing proficient in math increased from 46% in 2022 to 53% in 2023. Figure 6 also shows there was an increase in students testing at an advanced level in mathematics, with 12% testing at advanced levels in 2023 versus only 4% in 2022. Rock Valley 11<sup>th</sup> grade students tested better in both subjects from 2022 to 2023, but more improvement was seen in mathematics.

**Figure 6**

*Overall Grade 11 ISASP Scores*



**Weaknesses of the Current EL Program at Rock Valley**

The data shows areas of weakness and strength at Rock Valley High School. A weakness is the percentage of EL students testing proficient in all subject areas. The highest percentage of EL students testing proficient in any subject was grade 9 in ELA with 36% testing proficiently. EL students at Rock Valley tested below the state average for EL students in the categories of grade 9 math, grade 10 math, and grade 10 science (see Figures 1 and 2). Moreover, EL students consistently scored lower than the overall population regardless of grade or subject. Resources are being used to provide support for EL students in the classrooms, but efforts must be made to help EL students reach proficiency on statewide, standards-based assessments.

**Strengths of the Current EL Program at Rock Valley**

One of the biggest strengths of the EL program at Rock Valley is that it is supporting students to grow in their abilities in core content subjects. EL students showed growth across all subject areas for all grade levels from 2022 to 2023. Despite testing lower than the overall population at Rock Valley High School, students in the EL program show continual growth. The sheltered classes at Rock Valley are taught by the same teachers who teach the mainstream core classes. Data suggests that the teachers at Rock Valley High School are effective in their practices as the students test at or above the state average in almost all subject areas. High quality and effective teachers support EL students and allow them to grow in content area knowledge.

### **Action Plan**

For the English Learners at Rock Valley High School to achieve at the highest levels, strategies must be implemented to improve the current program. English learners often advance more than one grade level in a given school year (Short, 2002). If the goal is for students to grow in their abilities and knowledge, it is imperative that the school assesses students' baseline knowledge. Nearly 12% of English Learners immigrating to the United States have missed two or more years of learning (Freeman et al., 2001) Thus, students who move into the United States at a certain age may be multiple grade levels behind their peers. Testing should be done when students arrive in order to assess their level of competency and knowledge. Gaining an understanding of students' knowledge in different subject areas will allow for students to be placed in appropriate classes. It is important that students are placed in the correct classes so they are able to be engaged in the classroom and understand the material. Assessing students in both their home language and English is crucial for placing students in appropriate classes and accurately assessing their abilities (Johnson, 2023).

It is crucial that teachers create a welcoming and open environment for EL students (Hos, 2020). Students need to feel comfortable and safe to perform at their potential. Cultural differences exist between American culture and the culture of many students' home countries (DeCapua & Marshall, 2009). These cultural differences can foster culture shock and feelings of unease when students enter into American classroom. EL students must be taught the values and beliefs of the American education system to feel



comfortable in school (DeCapua & Marshall, 2009). A key strategy in helping students feel welcomed and comfortable in the classroom is teachers building relationships with the EL students in their classroom (DeCapua & Marshall, 2009). Placing students in the correct classes based on assessment data is also imperative in helping EL students feel comfortable in their classes. Placing students in classes that are too easy or too challenging can lead to students becoming disengaged and not learning to the best of their ability.

In addition to testing students to place them in appropriate classes and making students feel welcomed, a consistent curriculum is crucial. The curriculum in sheltered classes should help students learn the culture of the school, develop English language skills, and learn content area skills. EL students perform better when they are able to develop an understanding of the culture first (Hos, 2020). Once students feel comfortable in the classroom, they can grow in their understanding of the English language and core concepts. In the classroom it is important for teachers to set high expectations and standards for their EL students because they are very capable of meeting these high standards (Johnson, 2023). Once the learning environment and expectations are established, the teacher can begin teaching core concepts and helping students grow academically.

When teaching the core subjects, teachers should help students develop a strong understanding of the basic skills. During this time teachers should also be helping students grow in their understanding of the English language. Teachers should attempt to provide EL students with grade-level instruction when they are developing their English language skills (Hos et al., 2019). The goal is for EL students to perform at grade level in all subject areas. This goal is challenging because, presently, 71% of eighth graders in the U.S. who are English learners test below grade level (de Souza, 2010). Schools must have supports in place to help EL students achieve and grow in both their English language and core subject knowledge. With the right supports, EL students can catch up to their non-EL peers. EL students tend to grow more in a year than non-EL students (Johnson, 2023).

To see the biggest gains in the achievement level of EL students, teachers who work with these students need to be highly qualified and taught the most effective strategies to help them. English

learners are going to become more and more common in schools across the country. It is estimated that by 2025, one in four students will be classified as an English learner (de Souza, 2010). There is a major need for teachers to be trained to work with these students. While the majority of classroom teachers have at least one EL student in the classroom, only 29.5% of teachers have received professional development necessary to meet the linguistic and cultural needs of these students (Silva & Kucer, 2016). Schools should use professional development to train teachers in strategies, such as SIOP, that benefit all students, with a focus on the development of language skills for EL students. Research shows that SIOP is an effective model for teaching students as the strategy increases the achievement level of all students not just English learners (Whitenack, 2015).

Involving parents and keeping them informed is very important in helping EL students succeed. Parents play a big role in their children's education. It is imperative that teachers keep parents informed and use them as resources to help their students succeed. Parent involvement typically increases student achievement levels (He & Thompson, 2022). Communication with parents is especially important during transition time for EL students. Although investment from parents and caregivers involvement in children's education has been found to be most effective at early ages, older EL students and parents can also benefit (He & Thompson, 2022). Parent involvement combined with effective teaching strategies and accurate assessment data can set up EL students for success at all levels.

Formative assessment is also a very important factor for this plan will be successful. Formative assessment should be used to continually assess the progress of individual students and the class as a whole. All students benefit from formative assessment, not just EL students, so it is an effective strategy to use in any classroom. Formative assessment is imperative for EL students because it allows them to demonstrate mastery of concepts and a chance to express themselves visually (Llosa et al., 2022) Based on the information the teacher receives from the formative assessments, the teacher can interpret the data and give feedback based on the information received from the students (Llosa et al., 2022) Feedback is valuable for EL students because it gives them clear directions of how to improve. When the goal is to

help improve EL students' understanding of core concepts and the English language, formative assessment should be used often in all classrooms.

### **Steps To Address the Problem**

The following steps can be implemented at Rock Valley Middle and High School to improve the current ESL and newcomer program. Starting in May 2024, students currently in the ESL program should begin testing to assess their English proficiency and academic ability. Based on the results of testing, administration should decide what classes need to be offered and what teachers should teach the classes. Once a starting point is established, administration should create a sequence of classes for students to progress to graduation. The implementation of the following steps will ensure consistency and stability for the ESL program and EL students.

1. Administration assesses the needs of the facility and creates a list of classes that must be taught. Two different levels of EL classes should be offered. One class teaches basic skills and subject-based language acquisition. Another class is for students with a better understanding of the academic content and the English language, a class that teaches content closer to grade level.
2. Administration sets up a sequence of classes for EL students as they progress in their abilities and English language acquisition.
3. Administration assigns teachers to teach sheltered classes.
4. Administration meets with the teachers assigned to teach sheltered classes to discuss curriculum design and the goals and purposes of each class.
5. Teachers design curriculum based on standards, acquisition of academic language, and skills needed for EL students to successfully mainstream.
6. Teachers of same subject areas and administration meet to discuss proposed curriculum. During this time, teachers make sure that there is a progression in curriculum and that the same content is not being taught repeatedly.

7. Curriculum for sheltered classes is finalized and documented for future use so different teachers coming in know what material must be taught.
8. Rock Valley Middle/High School hosts an informational night for EL parents where they see an academic plan for their students, tour the facility, and receive information on how to stay informed about their students' progress.
9. Students are assessed using diagnostic testing to determine their level of English language acquisition and content knowledge.
10. Based on the results, students are placed in the appropriate classes and their progression of classes is established.
11. Once class rosters and class size are finalized, administration will assign paraprofessionals and ESL teachers to support EL students in their sheltered classes.
12. Throughout the year, teachers should continually be using formative assessment to monitor student achievement levels and growth. Teachers may need to make adjustments to their teaching strategies, techniques, and time frame as necessary.
13. During the year, teachers should communicate with parents about their students through email, phone calls, and parent-teacher conferences. A translator may need to assist when necessary.
14. Following the year, core content teachers, ESL teachers, and administration should meet to discuss what went well, what could be improved, and changes that need to be made. During this meeting, ISASP and ELPA scores should be looked at to see if students are progressing and if the plan in place is effective.
15. At the end of the year, the guidance counselor should meet with the core content teachers to discuss each EL student and confirm their class progression for the following year.

Following these steps should provide consistency and clarity in the ESL program. A scope and sequence will be established to ensure that curriculum is consistent from year to year. A progression of classes will also be established so parents, teachers, and students will know what classes students will need to take each year as they progress towards graduation. Once the plan is established, it is the

responsibility of the teachers and administration to constantly evaluate the effectiveness of the program and assess whether changes need to be made. The goal for carrying out these steps is to ensure that EL students at Rock Valley receive a consistent and high-quality education regardless of their English language skills or previous academic achievement levels. The timeline is summarized in Table 1 below.

**Implementation of School Improvement Plan**

**Timeline**

**Table 1**

*Timeline for Implementation of Proposed Plan*

<p>March 2024</p>	<p><i>Needs assessment</i>—analyze student data, testing data, class sizes, EL student progress data, and staffing needs for the next school year</p>
<p>April 2024</p>	<p><i>Finalize class offerings</i>—establish what sheltered classes must be offered in the 2024-2025 school year</p> <p><i>Establish sequence of classes in each subject area</i>—establish what is the progression of classes, moving from lower-level sheltered classes to mainstream classrooms</p> <p><i>Meetings between administration and classroom teachers</i>—assign what classes each teacher will be teaching and the standards that should be taught in the given class</p> <p><i>Creation of curriculum</i>—classroom teachers create curriculum for the sheltered classes they are teaching</p>
<p>May 2024</p>	<p><i>Content teacher meetings</i>—teachers go over curriculum with same content teachers and address gaps and overlap in content</p>

	<i>Finalize and document curriculum</i> —curriculum for each class is finalized and recorded for use in future years
August 2024	<p><i>Informational meeting for parents</i>—invitations are sent out to parents of EL and newcomer students about informational meeting; meeting is held to inform parents on policies and processes at school</p> <p><i>Diagnostic assessment of EL student</i>—students assessed on English language skills and content knowledge in all subjects</p> <p><i>Students assigned to classes</i>—students will be assigned to classes based on ability and English language skills</p> <p><i>Support staff assigned to classes</i>—principals will assign paraprofessionals and ESL teachers to assist in the sheltered classrooms</p>
Ongoing throughout 2024-2025 school year	<p><i>Formative assessment</i>—teachers use formative assessment in the classroom to assess progress of EL students</p> <p><i>Communication with parents</i>—communication between teachers and parents will occur at a minimum bi-weekly to discuss progress or concerns</p> <p><i>Communication between teachers and staff</i>—classroom teachers will keep support staff updated on students and voice any concerns</p>
October 2024	<i>Fall parent-teacher conferences</i> —teachers invite parents to attend and teachers set up parent-teacher conferences
March 2025	<i>Spring parent-teacher conference</i> — teachers invite parents to attend and teachers set up parent-teacher conferences

May 2025	<p><i>Analyze the plan</i>—meeting of administration, teachers, and counselors to discuss the plan and any changes that must be made</p> <p><i>Meetings between teachers and counselors</i>—teachers will discuss student performance and any changes that must be made to their progression in classes</p> <p><i>Finalize classes for returning EL students</i>—place EL students who were in the program in the 2024-2025 school year in the appropriate classes for the following school year</p>
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For the action plan to be successful, a timeline must be set for the procedure to be integrated with fidelity. Starting in March of 2024, administrators must begin a needs assessment of the students in the ESL program and finalize courses that will be offered in the 2024-2025 school year. There needs to be two different sheltered classes offered for each content area based on student ability. Once class offerings are finalized in early April, administration will set up a sequence of classes for ELs to progress and assign teachers to each of these classes. In mid-April 2024, building principals should meet with teachers to discuss what sheltered classes they will be teaching and which standards should be taught in the given class. After meeting in April, teachers will create a curriculum for their assigned class based on the standards. In May, teachers of the same content area should meet to make sure there is not overlap or holes in the curriculum. Once the curriculum is discussed and finalized in May of 2024, it should be recorded and written down so teachers in future years can know what is being taught in each class. All of these tasks should be completed before the end of May 2024.

There are also tasks that must be done starting in the 2024-2025 school year. In August before school starts, parents and guardians of ESL students will be invited to school for an informational meeting about school culture, expectations, the testing process, classes offered, and the progression of classes for ESL students. During the first week of school, EL students will be given diagnostic tests to assess their English language skills and academic levels. Based on the results, students will be placed in the appropriate classes and class rosters can be finalized. At this time paraprofessional and ESL teachers will be assigned to help in sheltered classes when possible.

Once scope and sequence are set up and students are assigned to classes, the work is not done. During each week of the year, teachers will use formative assessment to check where the students are at with their understanding of the English language and content. Formative assessments such as class checks serve to read individual work and assess the EL class's understanding as a whole (Llosa et al., 2022) Teachers may need to change their strategies or lesson delivery to meet the needs of the students in their classroom. In addition to using formative assessments, teachers will be communicating with paraprofessionals, ESL teachers, and parents about the progress of their students. This communication will occur at a minimum bi-weekly and more often if necessary. Communication can be done through phone calls, emails, or in-person meetings. At the end of the 2025 school year in late May, teachers and administration will meet to discuss how the program went and any changes that need to be made to the program. At this time, content teachers must meet with guidance counselors to discuss the ESL students in their class and confirm what class the students will be in for the following year.

### **Resources**



For the plan to be implemented with fidelity, teachers and administration must use appropriate resources to assess and guide students. The ELPA test can be used to assess ESL students' abilities to speak, write, listen, and read English. ESL students at Rock Valley take the ELPA test at the beginning and end of each school year. The results of the ELPA test give valuable information on how students are progressing in their mastery of the English language. Additional assessment resources include STAR testing, ISASP testing, and iReady. STAR testing assesses students' content knowledge; it can give feedback on students' grade level in different subject areas. The test goes through the eighth grade, so the results will show whether students are able to learn high school content. ISASP will be used as a summative assessment. ISASP data will provide information on whether students are proficient in each content area. Lastly, iReady can be used throughout the year to help students who are scoring below a high school level in core content areas. iReady is used to provide practice for students based on their ability. Having students work on iReady will allow teachers and administration to see how the students who are behind grade level are progressing in their content knowledge.

Other resources can be used to provide support to teachers and students throughout the year. One resource that teachers should use is the instructional coaches at Rock Valley; these professionals can provide resources and feedback for lessons. Translators are available at school to support teachers when they need to communicate with parents who do not speak English. In the classroom, teachers should attempt to provide some material in students' native language. This strategy can be applied through worksheets, videos, or use of other mediums. In addition to providing students with appropriate supports and resources, it is imperative that teachers use formative assessments to continually assess how EL students are progressing throughout the

year. All resources and assessments should be used to support EL students and help them improve their achievement levels in all subject areas.

### **Staff Responsibilities**

#### ***Administration***

It is the job of the administration to analyze the current state of the ESL program and also look at the data we have on the ESL students. Upon analyzing the available data, building principals should decide what sheltered classes are needed. They also are responsible for creating a scope and progression of classes for the ESL students as they progress towards graduation. Building principals should decide what content teachers should be teaching in each class. They are also expected to communicate what the purpose for the class is to the classroom teacher and what the expectations are for that given class such as standards, rigor, and skills learned. In addition to communicating the expectations to the teachers, principals should communicate with parents about what the sheltered classes will look like, how students will progress towards graduation, and how they can be involved in their student's education.

Throughout the year, the building principals should ensure that the classroom teachers are effectively teaching the students and that teachers are supporting the EL students appropriately. At the culmination of the year, administration should lead meetings with content teachers to discuss what changes need to be made to the program and the progress students are making. Any staffing needs should be addressed and handled by administration to guarantee that the EL students are getting adequate support to help them succeed. This support includes hiring additional personnel and assigning ESL teachers and paraprofessionals to assist in sheltered classes when appropriate.

#### ***Instructional Coaches***

Instructional coaches also play a role in assuring that the program succeeds. At the beginning of the year, instructional coaches should make sure that all EL students take the diagnostics tests and compile the results from these tests. After getting this information, the instructional coaches should meet with the guidance counselor to help make sure that all of the EL students are placed in the appropriate classes. In addition to helping with testing, instructional coaches will be responsible for finding additional resources that may help classroom teachers teach the EL students. Instructional coaches should support teachers in the classroom by giving them strategies and ideas that can help them in the classroom. If a teacher has questions about strategies to use, planning, or assessments in the classroom, they should seek the help of the instructional coaches.

### ***Content Teachers***

How successfully the program is implemented ultimately comes down to the classroom teachers. The classroom teachers work with the EL students every day to deliver instruction. It is also the classroom teachers' responsibility to establish the curriculum for their classes. Content teachers know the standards that students must learn and the content that must be mastered for them to be successful in future classes. The content teachers should meet with one another to make sure that there are not any major overlaps or holes in content.

After creating the curriculum, teachers have the responsibility to teach the curriculum every day. During the year, teachers may have to make changes to their planning or strategies to meet the needs of their students. Content teachers should constantly be using formative assessments in the classroom to assess the abilities of their students and the progress they are making. If teachers are struggling teaching a given concept or having trouble working with these students, teacher should seek the support of instructional coaches who can support the teachers

and offer advice. Another responsibility for teachers is to make sure that they are communicating with students' parents. Teachers should provide updates on students' progress, address any issues, and relay important information to the parents. Content teachers must be very flexible as they are required to fulfill many different responsibilities.

### *ESL Teachers*

Often, the ESL teachers work most closely with the EL students. It is important that the ESL teachers build good relationships with the EL students, content teachers, and parents. In the ESL classroom, ESL teachers should be providing content to help students progress in their acquisition and mastery of the English language. When ESL teachers are asked to go into the sheltered classrooms, they can team teach with the content teacher or assist the classroom teacher in providing language support to the EL students. ESL teachers can provide support and ideas to classroom teachers to help them teach the EL students in their given class. It is the expectation that ESL teachers also communicate with parents and provide them updates on their student's education.

### *Guidance Counselor*

The guidance counselor plays a major role in signing the EL students up for the correct classes and making sure that they are on the path towards graduation. Throughout the year, the guidance counselors should be finding time to meet with the EL students and see how they are doing socially and academically in their classes to make sure that they are comfortable. Guidance counselors should communicate with parents about what their students need to do to graduate. Guidance counselors may also provide EL students with information on job opportunities, activities and clubs at school, and post-high school career planning. At the end of the year,

classroom teachers and the guidance counselor should meet to discuss students who are struggling, excelling, or may need changes made to their schedule.

For the plan to be successful and implemented with fidelity, many different people must fill various roles. It is imperative that all individuals carry out their roles to support the EL students in the best way possible. If the plan is going to be successful, all parts must work together and support one another. The ultimate goal is to make sure that as a school we are setting up our EL students to be successful in the future.

### *Students*

Students also play a role in the effectiveness of this plan. It is the responsibility of the students to make sure that they are giving full effort when taking the diagnostic assessments and completing work in the classroom. If they are struggling to grasp concepts or language, they need to ask a teacher, principal, or guidance counselor for help. The students also need to communicate with their parents, relaying important information home. Students also need to assist other students. When a student is confused or struggling, one of their peers can be a valuable resource to help clarify information.

### *Parents*

It is the parents' responsibility to attend the informational meeting at the beginning of the year. When they have questions or concerns, they must contact school for these requests to be addressed. Parents also must hold their students accountable. Parents must check their student's grades and check-in with them to make sure that their student is feeling comfortable in school. It is also very important that parents are in communication with classroom teachers, so they can receive updates on the progression of their student.

### **Monitoring the Success and Failures of the Program**

Once the plan is set up and the steps are carried out, the task is not over. Everyone involved in the implementation of the plan should be constantly assessing how well the plan is working. When issues arise, they must be addressed immediately as amendments may need to be made to the program. To determine if the program is successful, stakeholders must assess whether progress is being made and the goals are being met. Data from ISASP results, ELPA testing, and students' performances in the classroom should all be monitored to see if the program is successful. Ideally, data should show that EL students in Rock Valley are growing in their English language acquisition and also in their content knowledge. The program's success should be judged on improvement and not just on raw scores because not all students come in at grade level. If the plan is working, EL students should be showing at least a year's worth of growth in all subject areas over the course of the school year, and their ELPA scores should increase. If students are not showing sufficient growth in their content knowledge and English language skills, changes must be made to the program. Ultimately, the goal is to bring all students at or above grade level in all content areas and help them achieve fluency in English.

### **Barriers and Challenges**

Barriers and challenges are sure to arise as with any plan. One major challenge is when students move into the district in the middle of the school year. These students will still need to be tested and placed in the appropriate classes, but they may not have the same background knowledge as the other students in the classroom. Another challenge is that EL students have a tendency to move frequently, resulting in students being suddenly added or dropped from the classroom roster. This dynamic poses a challenge in planning because numbers are constantly changing.

A challenge for teachers is making sure that they are trained and comfortable working with EL students. Additional professional development may need to be provided at the school to make sure that all teachers have the appropriate training to work with EL students. It can take a long time to get teachers trained with the right strategies and skills. Another challenge can be when teachers move in or out of the district. Other teachers may be asked to teach classes they have not taught before or that are new to them. Staffing can also be an obstacle that must be overcome. The population of EL students is continually growing, so there is the challenge of making sure that Rock Valley CSD has enough teachers and paraprofessionals to meet the needs of these students. All of these challenges and barriers must be addressed and overcome for the program to be successful.

### **Conclusion**

The goal of this school improvement plan is to improve the achievement levels of newcomers and EL students. By increasing their achievement levels, Rock Valley CSD will set up the students to be successful in their future classes and in mainstream classrooms. This school improvement plan attempts to attain these goals by creating a scope and sequence for the newcomers and EL students. The implementation of the school improvement plan will guarantee increased consistency and clarity for all people who work with and teach the newcomer and EL students.

### **Major Themes**

English learners are the fastest growing subgroup in the nation (National Center for Education statistics, 2023). These students pose a unique challenge since they have limited English skills and have difficulties reading, writing, listening, and speaking English. Many newcomers and EL students struggle adjusting to the culture of American schools due to their lack of English language skills and culture shock. English

learners often struggle more in school than their native-born peers. It is the responsibility of the public schools to address the needs of these students and provide appropriate support.

There are many strategies that teachers and administration in public schools can use to best serve the needs of their newcomers and EL students. Strategies used in the classroom are more influential than the language of instruction (Freeman et al., 2001). Effective strategies for teaching newcomers and EL students include explicitly teaching culture and rules, setting high expectations, and promoting parent involvement in their student's education. It is also important that teachers help EL students feel comfortable in the classroom as social belonging had greater effects on EL students than on the general population (LaCrosse et al., 2020). More than anything, highly effective classrooms have the highest effect on whether students will achieve.

### **Problem Revisited**

The purpose of the school improvement plan is to strategically address how schools can establish a scope and sequence for their newcomer and EL students that will prepare them to be successful when they enter the mainstream classroom. By examining the history and challenges faced by English learners and newcomers, in addition to analyzing what strategies work best with these students, Rock Valley CSD can establish a consistent scope and sequence for newcomers and English learners as they progress through middle school and high school. The implementation of the school improvement plan will provide clarity and consistency for teachers, administration, and parents as they work with newcomers and EL students. The goal of the school improvement plan is to improve the achievement levels of all newcomers and EL students in the areas of English acquisition and core content knowledge.

### **Summary of Findings**

As of 2013, only 61% of English learners were graduating from high school (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). In addition to having a lower graduation rate than the general population, research has shown that people who speak English poorly earn 33 percent less than people who speak



English well (Barrow & Markman-Pithers, 2016). Data also shows that students who have ever been in EL programs have consistently scored lower in math and English than their peers who have never been in an EL program (Johnson, 2023). These stats show the importance of helping English learners grow academically and in their use of the English language. EL students are capable of consistently gaining more than a year of content in most subjects over the course of the school year (Johnson, 2023). Newcomers and EL students can learn quickly and close the achievement gap between their native-born peers when given the right support. One way to better serve the EL students at Rock Valley is creating a scope and sequence for English learners as they progress through middle and high school.

When working with newcomers and EL students, it is important to set high expectations for the students. EL students benefit from structure, expectations, and routines when they are entering a new environment (Freeman et al., 2021). Family involvement and interaction also play a big factor on EL students' achievement levels. Family involvement is needed for EL students when they are acclimating to a new school and culture (He & Thompson, 2020). Another key factor in helping EL students succeed is having teachers explicitly teach culture and the rules of the school (Hos et al., 2019). Students need to be comfortable in the environment they are in if they are to succeed. It is imperative that teachers working with EL students set high expectations, encourage parent involvement and interaction, and provide a safe environment so students feel comfortable in the classroom.

When creating this plan, it was important to consider the history and background of these students, the unique challenges they face, and successful strategies to use in the classroom. The goal of creating this plan is to help English learners progress in their understanding of the English language and academic core content. The ultimate goal would be for English learners to perform at the same levels as their native-born peers. The implementation of this plan will help all who are involved by providing clarity, direction, and consistency to better serve the needs of English learners at Rock Valley CSD.

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