

Write to Succeed: Improving English Learner Literacy in New Mexico (REL Southwest)

Institute of Education Sciences

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IH56_I2OCgs

Narrator: English learner and multilingual students bring a wealth of cultural and linguistic assets to their educational environments. However, a large percentage of educators feel underprepared to support English learner students. Equipping both English learners specialists and content teachers with the skills to deliver evidence-based literacy instruction has the potential to improve outcomes for not only English learners students but all students.

Regional Educational Laboratory, REL Southwest, and the New Mexico Public Education Department formed the Southwest English Learner Literacy Swell partnership in 2023 to help New Mexico educators deliver high quality literacy instruction that supports all students, including English learners, students in developing stronger literacy and writing skills.

Brenda Arellano: So we've been working with the New Mexico Public Education Department for a number of years, focusing on the achievement gaps in New Mexico. So our current partnership, we have some elements related to cultural and linguistic responsive education, teacher collaboration, and then we also have these evidence-based literacy practices. So we are bringing them all together in Write to Succeed.

Narrator: The Southwest English Learner Literacy Swell Partnership is implementing, refining, and testing Write to Succeed, a professional learning program to help grades four through eight teachers implement literacy instructional units with appropriate supports for English learners students.

Edgardo Castro: Our district decided to join the Write to Succeed program primarily because if a student cannot write, of course, the student is not reading. And so we are trying our best to give that opportunity to all teachers in our district, to encourage them in day-to-day writing in their classrooms. Because at the end of the day, they will be the one to really refine what reading and writing looks like in their four corners of their classroom.

Narrator: Instructional coaches participate in Write to Succeed by leading a team of grades four through eight teachers in professional learning and instructional planning, and supporting teachers as they implement evidence-based literacy practices in the classroom.

Renee Byrum: So my name is Renee Byrum. I am an instructional coach at Eagle Ridge Middle School in Rio Rancho Public Schools. I am also implementing the Write to Succeed program as a coach. We are a fairly larger district than we have around the state. In turn, we also have a lot of kids who come to us speaking a different first language. So whether it's Spanish, Navajo, or whatever language that their home language is, it could be different.

One thing that Write to Succeed emphasizes is the background knowledge and the student assets. And so this program really highlights those two to bring into the classroom, and really just opens it up for teachers to see those different things.

Brenda Arellano: Oftentimes we naturally gravitate to think that English language arts, that's where writing happens. And it does oftentimes, but writing is so important in so many other content areas. And oftentimes maybe those other content areas might not spend as much time really digging into how to make those arguments. So that's what I think is really unique about Write to Succeed. We're saying that any teachers, you are welcome to come and really use Write to Succeed to help your students develop those skills and elevate those skills.

Renee Byrum: So I feel like oftentimes trainings are like, you just "sit and you get," but this program offers an opportunity for me as a coach to engage in the curriculum. To go through the process that we're asking teachers to go through.

Narrator: So how do teachers participate in Write to Succeed? When teachers participate in Write to Succeed, they will attend group professional learning sessions led by a local REL Southwest-trained coach. At the sessions, the coach will model Evidence-based literacy practices. Later, teachers will identify a curricular unit to enhance with the program's practices, and plan how to implement them with their coach and teacher team. While teachers implement the program's practices, their coach will offer support by either observing the lesson or co-teaching. Once the unit is complete, teachers will debrief with their coach, and continue developing a plan to implement Write to Succeed in future lessons.

Renee Byrum: I think the thing that really got me and hooked me was just that it offered so much support. It offered scaffolding for this writing process that students often struggle with. It takes different aspects of where we want them to be, and breaks it down and chunks it really nicely.

Kamolparn Higgins: Our students need the scaffolding because a lot of them come in with very little writing skills, as far as grammatics, vocabulary, word choices, and things like that because we have a lot of students that are second language learners. It's something that you can use to add to your instructional strategies. It's just another piece in the toolbox.

Brenda Arellano: I mean, I think writing can be very intimidating. And so what we're hoping is that writing can be really fun. It can be a creative outlet to express themselves. That they can lean on their teachers and develop a process to dig a little bit deeper and really understand text, and then be able to express their thoughts.

Renee Byrum: I feel like this program helps remind not only teachers, but students, that whether it's reading, writing, or just understanding different elements, we can have these successes together.

Edgardo Castro: And what it is, it all boils down to achieving all students, no matter who you are or where you come from, that you are proficient in reading and graduating high school.

Narrator: This video was developed by REL Southwest. REL Southwest works in partnership with educators and policymakers to design, develop, and carry out activities that use data and evidence to achieve meaningful improvements in student outcomes. The REL program is administered by the Institute of Education Sciences, IES, at the US Department of Education. To learn more about REL programs, visit our website, subscribe to our X feed, and sign up to receive our newsletters and other publications.