



## Universal Access Handbook

Supporting Each and Every Learner: Differentiation, Access, and Language Development

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## How to Use This Handbook

This handbook is organized into eight sections to support your implementation of Newsela *Threads & Themes*. Each section addresses key components of universal access and supports for diverse learners. Use the table below to find the section that best meets your instructional needs, depending on your role.

Section	Focus	Role
<b>1. MTSS Framework</b>	Tiered intervention and formative assessment	All teachers
<b>2. Multilingual Learner Support</b>	ELD integration and language development	ELD/ELA teachers
<b>3. Differentiated Instruction</b>	Embedded scaffolds and access points	All teachers
<b>4. Advanced Learners</b>	Enrichment and extension activities	All teachers
<b>5. AAE &amp; Language Variation</b>	Linguistic diversity and dialects	All teachers
<b>6. Complex Text Access</b>	Read-aloud and scaffolding strategies	All teachers
<b>7. School-Home Communication</b>	Family engagement and multilingual materials	All teachers, admin
<b>8. Accommodations &amp; Accessibility</b>	Access and demonstration accommodations	SpEd coordinators, all teachers

# Section 1: MTSS Framework

## 1.1 Overview

A **Multi-Tiered System of Supports** or **MTSS** is a whole-child systemic, proactive framework that uses ongoing academic, behavioral, social skill, attendance, and other student data to match the right level of instruction and support to the needs of each and every student. Rather than a reactive "wait-to-fail" model, MTSS integrates and expands on two historically separate systems: Response to Intervention (RtI), which focuses on academic support, and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which addresses behavioral and social-emotional needs. By unifying these efforts under a single "umbrella" framework, the system provides a coherent approach to supporting every learner's trajectory.

*Threads & Themes* was designed to fit seamlessly into a district's MTSS framework with an intentionally-designed, high-quality core ELA program with embedded formative assessments to guide MTSS decisions. The program is designed around the principle of tailoring support within a systematic framework rather than providing a separate curriculum, ensuring all students maintain access to grade-level inquiry. The program supports described in this handbook also include detailed recommendations and guidance for screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring measures that assess underlying reading skills to identify students at risk for reading difficulties, including dyslexia, inform MTSS tier placement and movement, and guide instructional decision-making.

### Core Components of MTSS

- **Universal Screening:** All students are assessed at regular intervals (typically 3x per year) to identify who is on track and who may need additional support.
- **Evidence-Based Practices:** All instructional and intervention strategies are grounded in research with proven effectiveness across diverse student populations.
- **Instructional Equity:** The framework ensures that all students—regardless of background—have access to high-quality core instruction, enrichment, and targeted support.
- **Formative Assessment:** Ongoing, daily checks for understanding provide the real-time evidence necessary to adjust instruction and bridge the gap between initial learning and mastery, ensuring that Tier 1 instruction remains responsive and that additional supports are targeted and timely.
- **Data-Based Decision Making:** Collaborative educator teams regularly review student data to adjust instruction and intervention based on evidence rather than assumptions.

#### Teacher Tip: Local Context and MTSS

Every school and district is unique; as such, different systems may define MTSS slightly differently or choose to focus more deeply on specific components—such as social-emotional learning, attendance, or academic interventions—based on their specific student population and goals.

## Systemic Support for Data-Based Decision Making and Collaboration

Another core component of an effective MTSS framework is the use of a data-based decision-making process to solve problems and design supports. To support this systemic need, Schoolytics by Newsela (an optional, district data and MTSS workflow tool that can be paired with *Threads & Themes*) provides a unified platform that integrates student data—including screening, progress monitoring, and formative results—to help educator teams identify student needs efficiently and monitor the effectiveness of interventions in real time. By centralizing these data points, districts can ensure that MTSS implementation remains proactive and grounded in evidence rather than assumptions.

### Teacher Tip: Streamlining MTSS Collaboration

Utilizing a centralized data platform allows MTSS teams to focus their energy on instructional design and direct student support rather than manual data entry. This systemic efficiency ensures that student needs are identified early and that instructional adjustments happen in real time based on current evidence.

## 1.2 Three Tiers at a Glance

The framework is organized into three tiers representing different levels of instructional intensity. Decision rules for movement between tiers are based on systematic progress monitoring of student response to instruction.

Tier	Name	Description	Reach*	Assessment Frequency
Tier 1	<b>The Universal Tier:</b> Core Instruction with embedded differentiation	<b>Universal Support:</b> High-quality, evidence-based instruction delivered to all students in the general education setting. Includes regular progress monitoring and enrichment for students ready for acceleration.	All students at or above benchmark (typically ~80–85% of students)	Universal screening 3x/year; daily classroom formative assessments
Tier 2	<b>Targeted:</b> Small-group intervention with supplemental supports	<b>Targeted Support:</b> Supplemental interventions provided in addition to Tier 1 for students not sufficiently responding to core instruction. Often delivered in	10th–25th percentile; 0–1 year below grade level; no major decoding needs (typically ~10–15% of students)	Progress monitoring every 2 weeks and ongoing formative checks

		small groups with increased frequency and specificity.		
<b>Tier 3</b>	<b>Intensive:</b> Individualized intervention supports	<b>Intensive Support:</b> Highly individualized, intensive interventions for students with significant and persistent academic, behavioral, or social-emotional needs.	Below 10th percentile; 1.5+ years below grade level; significant decoding needs (typically ~3–5% of students)	Progress monitoring weekly + ongoing formative/diagnostic checks

*\*Percentages are approximate and vary by school and district context.*

### Teacher Tip: Prioritizing Tier 1 for Acceleration

The most effective way to accelerate learning is to ensure students remain engaged in high-quality Tier 1 core instruction. While intervention is a critical safety net, many systems find more students in Tier 2 and Tier 3 than typically should be due to gaps in core access. By focusing on robust Tier 1 instruction with real-time formative feedback, teachers can reduce the need for pull-out services and ensure all learners benefit from the rigor of grade-level inquiry.

## Formative Assessment in Tier 1 Core Instruction

Within the Tier 1 universal setting, *Threads & Themes* embeds formative assessment at every level to drive instructional adjustments before students reach a point of failure. This architecture includes:

- Daily Checks for Understanding: Brief, actionable checks integrated into every lesson allow teachers to identify who needs more time, modeling, or challenge in real time.
- Look Back Tasks: End-of-lesson components such as Exit Tickets and "mini writes" capture immediate data to inform the next day's instruction.
- Responsive Flex Days: Planned instructional pauses that allow teachers to use formative data—including "Look-Fors" and "Confidence Continuum" results—to assign students to targeted small-group Huddles for reteaching or extension.

## 1.3 Universal Screening

Universal screening is the process of identifying student and system needs by casting a wide net efficiently. The goal is to distinguish students who are likely "on track" from those who are excelling or who may need more support or further investigation. Screening assessments help identify which students need Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention. In a proactive MTSS framework, these assessments are administered universally to all students at set points in the year.

- **Frequency:** Universal screening is administered at least annually, three times per year: Fall, Winter, and Spring.
- **Types of Screening:** While often academic, screening can also include non-academic data such as behavioral, social skills, mental health, or attendance to support the whole child.

## Universal Screening Tools

To accurately identify these needs, *Threads & Themes* recommends utilizing established, evidence-based instruments for screening, such as the tools shown below.

- Acadience Reading
- aimswebPlus Reading
- FastBridge
- i-Ready Reading Diagnostic
- STAR Reading
- MAP Growth

## Tier Placement Rules (Recommended, Not Prescriptive)

These placement guidelines are grounded in evidence, not assumptions. Decisions should always depend on available resources and professional judgment.

- **Tier 1:** Students scoring at or above benchmark (~80-85% of students); typically placed in Tier 1 for core instruction following the screening assessment.
- **Tier 2:** Students scoring in the 10th–25th percentile (~10-15% of students); typically placed in Tier 2 for targeted intervention.
- **Tier 3:** Students scoring below the 10th percentile (~3-5% of students); typically placed in Tier 3 for intensive intervention.

### Teacher Tip: Equity in Screening

Universal screening increases equity by ensuring all students—regardless of background—have access to high-quality instruction, enrichment, and timely targeted support. If a significant proportion of students are below benchmark, consider a “Tier 1.5” or Classwide Intervention approach to strengthen core instruction. This reduces the burden on individual pull-out services.

## 1.4 Tier 2: Targeted Intervention

Once universal screening identifies students who are not sufficiently responding to Tier 1 core instruction, they are typically placed in **Tier 2** for targeted supplemental support. These interventions are delivered in small-group settings and typically focus on specific skills that require increased frequency and specificity beyond the general education setting. For middle school students (Grades 6–8), Tier 2 Interventions typically target foundational skills such as morphology, word study, reading fluency, or reading comprehension.

To support this work, the Literacy Lab in most lessons reinforces foundational skills for all students in the general education setting – serving as an intentional bridge from elementary to secondary literacy by providing explicit, systematic instruction in morphology and academic vocabulary.

### Progress Monitoring

To track a student’s response to instruction, educators conduct progress monitoring every 2 weeks using research-based tools. After collecting 6 progress monitoring probes, educators use a data-based decision rule to determine next steps:

- **Continue:** If the student performs at or above the goal line on 4 of the 6 most recent probes, continue the Tier 2 intervention.
- **Adapt:** If the student performs below the goal line on any of the 6 most recent probes, intensify or adapt the Tier 2 intervention.
- **Exit:** If the student reaches the goal within 8–15 weeks, return to Tier 1 with continued monitoring.
- **Escalate:** If the student does not reach the goal within 15 weeks, consider continuing another Tier 2 cycle or moving to Tier 3.

### 1.5 Tier 3: Intensive Intervention

Tier 3 provides highly individualized, intensive support for the small percentage of students (typically ~3-5%) with significant academic, behavioral, or social-emotional needs. At this level, instruction is highly focused and guided by diagnostic assessment findings to understand exactly where a breakdown in learning is occurring. Students receiving Tier 3 interventions require weekly progress monitoring to ensure the intensive intervention is effective and to inform real-time adjustments.

#### Diagnostic Assessments for Tier 3

It is important to note that the goal of a diagnostic assessment is to pinpoint specific skill gaps, concepts or processes a student has yet to master. While these tools are essential for designing targeted instruction, the field is moving away from routine standardized diagnostic assessment for all students receiving Tier 3 instruction to avoid increasing the assessment burden and taking time away from intervention itself.

- The tools below are recommended resources for deep-dive investigation when the foundation of a student’s struggles remains unclear despite robust screening and formative data. These assessments are particularly valuable when considering potential special education (SPED) placement
- Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing, 2nd Edition (CTOPP-2)
- Gray Oral Reading Tests, 5th Edition (GORT-5)
- Test of Word Reading Efficiency, 2nd Edition (TOWRE-2)
- Woodcock-Johnson V Tests of Achievement

Tier 3 instruction requires close coordination between the classroom teacher and special education staff to ensure consistency and intensity of support across all settings.

### Teacher Tip: Diagnostic Purpose

Always use diagnostic tools sparingly and purposefully. Students who have already received Tier 2 intervention should have substantial data pointing to the nature of their difficulties. The purpose of further diagnostic testing is to refine the instructional plan rather than confirming a student is struggling.

## 1.6 Dyslexia-Specific Considerations

Students with dyslexia characteristics have different exit criteria than students in the general MTSS population. These students must demonstrate growth in **both decoding skills and grade-level content standards** before exiting Tier 2 intervention.

Because middle school students often develop sophisticated ways to navigate complex texts, educators must use targeted observations and specific data points to identify and support underlying dyslexia characteristics:

- **Tracking decoding separately from comprehension:** Middle school students with dyslexia may “mask” underlying decoding needs through compensatory strategies such as context clues or background knowledge.
- **Isolation of Data:** It is critical to track decoding growth separately from reading comprehension using tools that isolate word-level reading, such as the CTOPP-2, TOWRE-2, and GORT-5. Do not use comprehension performance alone as evidence that decoding skills are on track.
- **Rapid Automatic Naming (RAN):** RAN assessments are essential for identifying dyslexia characteristics because they measure symbol retrieval speed -- a process distinct from phonological awareness. If standard screening does not produce a clear picture, teachers should coordinate with the school psychologist, MTSS coordinator, or special education team to request a RAN assessment as it is not a classroom assessment. The CTOPP-2 is a commonly-used tool in California for this purpose.
- **Structured Literacy Compatibility:** *Threads & Themes* is designed to reinforce structured literacy approaches delivered in Tier 2 and Tier 3 settings (including Orton-Gillingham and related frameworks). Tier 1 instruction in the program is designed to support, rather than undermine, the explicit, systematic intervention work students may be receiving in other settings. To ensure instructional integrity, teachers should utilize the explicit multisensory instructional routines with accompanying fidelity checklists located in the Differentiation Playbook.

### Dyslexia-Specific Cross-References

The following resources provide further detail on how *Threads & Themes* specifically addresses the instructional and assessment needs of students with dyslexia characteristics:

- **Written Production:** For guidance on supporting students with dyslexia characteristics in written production tasks, see Section 3.5a (Phonological-Based Spelling Difficulties).
- **Assessment Tools:** For progress monitoring tools used to assess decoding skills distinctly from reading comprehension, see Section 1.5.

## Section 2: Multilingual Learner Support

### 2.1 Overview

*Threads & Themes* is designed with an Integrated-First Architecture, meaning ELD supports are embedded in every ELA lesson and reinforced through parallel Designated ELD (D-ELD) instruction. This dual approach ensures **Multilingual Learners (MLs)** have access to grade-level content while building academic English explicitly.

#### Leveraging Linguistic Assets

The *Threads & Themes* program is grounded in the belief that a student's home language and cultural background are powerful foundations for academic success. This asset-based approach acknowledges that while these supports are essential for MLs, they are broadly applicable to all students as they navigate the increasingly complex academic language demands of grade-level inquiry.

- **ELD practice is best practice for all.** The supports described in this section are designed primarily for identified Multilingual Learner students, but they are applicable for any student developing academic language, not only those who are English L2 learners.

#### Instructional Equity

Teachers differentiate and provide support based on what each student needs, whether they are ML, SPED, or neither. This approach treats linguistic and cultural diversity as a resource to strengthen learning – not as a deficit to remediate.

### 2.2 The Two-Part ELD Design

In alignment with the California ELA/ELD Framework, *Threads & Themes* provides a comprehensive English language development program through both Integrated and Designated ELD. This dual-approach architecture ensures that Multilingual Learners (MLs) develop high-level academic English while simultaneously engaging with grade-level disciplinary content.

#### Integrated ELD

ELD supports are embedded within ELA lessons to ensure all students can access the rigor of grade-level inquiry. *Threads & Themes* facilitates this integration through:

- **Linguistic Scaffolds:** Sentence frames, language bridges, and if/then contingent prompts that scale based on need.
- **Intentional Vocabulary:** Targeted morphological and contextual word study.
- **Strategic Participation:** Structured opportunities for collaborative discussion and home-language affirmation.

#### Designated ELD

Separate, dedicated ELD periods are designed to build into and from the language demands encountered in ELA. The program supports Designated ELD through:

- **Explicit Language Instruction:** A focus on how English functions at the word, sentence, and discourse levels.
- **Proficiency-Based Toolkits:** Targeted portfolios for Emerging, Expanding, and Bridging levels that develop formal academic register.
- **Synchronized Pacing:** Lessons that explicitly prepare students for the oral and written tasks required in their core ELA units.

## 2.3 Integrated ELD in Practice

*Threads & Themes* operationalizes the California ELA/ELD Framework's vision of language development as inseparable from content learning by embedding language supports directly within every ELA lesson. Rather than simplifying the curriculum, these integrated practices provide the high-challenge, high-support environment necessary for Multilingual Learners to engage with complex, grade-level texts and tasks. By utilizing a consistent set of replicable routines and scaffolding tools, the program ensures that students develop academic English—including vocabulary, syntax, and discourse—while doing the real intellectual work of the unit.

The following instructional moves and tools are used daily to support integrated language development:

- **Language Bridges:** Three-term frames that show conceptual progression. For example, in Grade 8 Unit 1 Lesson 1, the language bridge is "System → Affects → Daily Life." This helps students organize their thinking and build sentences using connectors and academic vocabulary.
- **If/Then Contingent Supports:** Decision-tree-based teacher prompts tailored to common student response patterns that guide students toward more sophisticated or academic responses in real time. For example: "If students define only → Prompt: Can you give an example?"
- **Sentence Frames:** Structured academic language scaffolds provided at the Emerging, Expanding, and Bridging proficiency levels to support written and oral production. For example, students might use: "Segregation is a system that \_\_\_" at the Emerging level.
- **Native Language Affirmation:** Intentional opportunities for students to validate their linguistic resources by confirming understanding or expressing ideas in their home language as an asset for new learning.
- **Proficiency-Level Tiered Supports for Academic Discussion and Showcase:** Level-specific sentence stems, modeled exchanges, and oral-rehearsal supports – available directly in the Integrated ELD dropdown. – that scale based on student need during high-stakes seminar talk and unit-end performances.

## 2.4 Designated ELD: Purpose and Structure

Designated ELD (D-ELD) is a protected instructional period where Multilingual Learners receive explicit language instruction tailored to their proficiency level. In accordance with California's ELD standards, these lessons do not replace core ELA instruction; instead, they serve as a strategic "bridge" by deconstructing and practicing the specific language forms and functions students must master to succeed in their concurrent ELA lessons.

### Core Rule

"If students cannot speak, read, write, or comprehend longer, clearer, more academic sentences at the end of the lesson than at the beginning, the lesson is not Designated ELD." Every Designated ELD lesson must move students forward in their ability to use academic English.

#### What Designated ELD is:

- **Explicit language instruction:** Lessons are precisely aligned to the core language demands of ELA and content texts.
- **Built “into” and “from” content:** Texts and tasks supplement the core ELA unit to deepen linguistic competence within a familiar, meaningful context.
- **Development of communication:** Instruction targets the growth of effective communication for both social and academic purposes.
- **Contextualized learning:** Language and content learning are integrated in a contextualized, authentic manner.

#### What Designated ELD is NOT:

- **A simplified version of the ELA lesson:** D-ELD focuses on language mechanics and discourse, not just a “lighter” version of the unit’s reading.
- **A comprehension check or assessment:** The goal is language production, not merely verifying if a student understood a story.
- **Disconnected instruction:** Vocabulary and grammar are never taught in isolation from meaning-making.
- **ELA intervention:** D-ELD is dedicated to language development, not academic re-teaching or remediation.

### The Structured Four-Part Lesson

Most Designated ELD lessons follow a consistent architecture to ensure predictable, high-impact language practice:

- **Launch (2–5 minutes):** Establishes the lesson’s purpose, activates prior knowledge, and introduces the key language focus.
- **Literacy Lab (10–15 minutes):** Features modeling and explicit instruction of specific language forms and functions.
- **Learning in Action (15–20 minutes):** Provides guided and independent practice with a heavy emphasis on oral and written language production.
- **Look Back (3–5 minutes):** Focuses on reflection and formative assessment via exit tickets or Confidence Continuum.

## 2.5 Proficiency Level Differentiation

The CA ELD Standards organize Multilingual Learner development across three levels: **Emerging**, **Expanding**, and **Bridging**. *Threads & Themes* builds differentiation directly into the program architecture so that teachers can focus on responsive instruction rather than manual scaffold design.

## Understanding the California ELD Proficiency Levels

The three proficiency levels described below are drawn directly from the CA ELD Standards and provide the foundation for how *Threads & Themes* differentiates instruction, scaffolding, and language production expectations across the program.

- **Emerging:** *Students at this level typically progress very quickly, learning to use English for immediate needs as well as beginning to understand and use academic vocabulary and other features of academic language.*
- **Expanding:** *Students at this level are challenged to increase their English skills in more contexts and learn a greater variety of vocabulary and linguistic structures, applying their growing language skills in more sophisticated ways that are appropriate to their age and grade level.*
- **Bridging:** *Students at this level continue to learn and apply a range of high-level English language skills in a wide variety of contexts, including comprehension and production of highly technical texts. The “bridge” alluded to is the transition to full engagement in grade-level academic tasks and activities in a variety of content areas without the need for specialized ELD instruction. However, ELs at all levels of English language proficiency fully participate in grade-level tasks in all content areas with varying degrees of scaffolding in order to develop both content knowledge and English.*

**Source:** *California English Language Development Standards, p. 19*

## How Proficiency Differentiation Appears Across the Program

The program utilizes a dual-approach architecture to ensure students receive both contextualized and explicit language support.

### Integrated ELD (Across All Content)

Differentiation is embedded within core ELA lessons to ensure grade-level access for all proficiency levels.

- **Proficiency-Level Supports:** Available at the moment of instruction via the Integrated ELD dropdown.
- **Lesson Types:** High-demand Academic Discussion and Showcase lessons include tiered supports – such as pre-viewed vocabulary for Emerging or discourse markers for Bridging – embedded directly in the lesson.

### Scaffolding Principle

Scaffolds are offered flexibly (“offered, not assigned”) so students can receive the support matching their current need.

## Designated ELD

Differentiation is the primary focus, with supports woven into every point of student language production.

- **Differentiation Tables:** Every lesson opens with a Differentiation Table that summarizes the supports and expected output for each proficiency level.
- **Tiered Production:** Sentence frames, “Listen-Fors” and “Look-Fors,” and teacher tips are calibrated to specific Em/Ex/Br response.
- **Unit Language Toolkits:** Located outside of the lesson, students work from printed in specific Emerging, Expanding, and Bridging editions to build proficiency-matched language portfolios.

↗ **See also:** For routines that pair across I-ELD and D-ELD, see Section 2.6 (ML-Specific Lesson Routines) and Section 2.8 (ML-Adjacent Routines in ELA).

## Summary of Differentiation Routines

The following routines are utilized in both Integrated and Designated contexts, adjusted by proficiency level:

Support Type	Emerging	Expanding	Bridging
<b>Sentence Frames</b>	Fully scaffolded frames with blanks to fill in	Partial frames with key connectors provided	Open-ended academic prompts
<b>Language Bridge</b>	Teacher models; students repeat and rehearse	Students complete collaboratively with partners	Students generate independently
<b>Writing Output</b>	Sentence-level responses	Paragraph-level responses	Extended response and elaboration
<b>Oral Production</b>	Choral repetition; echo read; phrase-by-phrase	Small group with rehearsal; sentence strips	Whole group; spontaneous response

### Implementation Notes

ELD level assignment is a starting point, not a fixed label. Teachers should adjust scaffolds based on formative evidence and “fade” support as students move toward higher levels of independence. Adjust scaffolds based on formative evidence within the lesson.

## 2.6 ML-Specific Lesson Routines

Designated ELD (D-ELD) lessons employ a consistent suite of routines and protocols designed to provide students with the high-support, low-stakes environment necessary for language experimentation. These routines are intentionally replicable, allowing students to focus their cognitive energy on linguistic production rather than navigating new procedures.

### Key Routines Include:

- **Fluency Practice (Echo Read / Choral Read):** Develops oral reading prosody and automaticity through repetitive, modeled vocalization that builds confidence with grade-level syntax.
- **Language Bridge:** Utilizes a three-term conceptual frame (e.g., Cause → Effect → Impact) to assist students in organizing complex thoughts and building sophisticated, academic sentences.
- **Rehearse & Refine: Provides a structured opportunity for** students to practice new language in safe, small-group or partner context, allowing them to iterate on their ideas before contributing to whole-group sharing.
- **Reflection:** Encourages student agency by providing specific moments for self-assessment of language development, where students monitor their own progress and confidence.
- **Think-Pair-Share:** Facilitates structured oral language practice through immediate peer support, ensuring every student has an opportunity for verbal engagement.

↗ **See also:** *Designated ELD Routines Guide for a deeper dive into these protocols, including step-by-step teacher moves and student-facing scripts.*

## 2.7 Newcomer Support

**Newcomer students** represent a distinct instructional population that requires an “into and from” approach—developing foundational English while simultaneously accessing the core grade-level curriculum. *Threads & Themes* supports newcomer students through overlapping instructional priorities: building oral English as the foundation for literacy, providing individualized and flexible instruction that meets students where they are and addresses their social-emotional needs, and suggesting a structured 120-day pathway that honors and supports the unique trajectory of Newcomer students in their first two years of U.S. schooling.

### Individualized, Flexible Instruction

Newcomers are not a homogeneous group. A newcomer with strong home language academic literacy has profoundly different needs than a student with Interrupted Formal Schooling (SIFE) who may not have consistent literacy in any language. Effective newcomer instruction requires individualized assessment of home language literacy, prior schooling, and oral English development -- and flexible grouping and task design that responds to those findings.

- **Individualized Entry Assessment:** To determine the appropriate placement pathway, teachers and support staff (e.g., MTSS coordinators) should assess three key data points upon enrollment:
  1. *Home language literacy level:* Can the student read and write fluently in their home language?
  2. *Prior schooling history:* Was it consistent, interrupted, or no schooling?
  3. *Oral English exposure:* Was there some prior instruction, or “true zero” exposure?
- **Flexible Grouping:** Newcomers should not be isolated in separate settings for the full school day. Integration into core ELA instruction -- with appropriate scaffolding -- provides exposure to grade-level academic language models that isolated instruction cannot replicate. Instruction should include a mix of whole-class participation, small teacher-led groups for targeted language work, and bilingual partner structures when available. **Strategic bilingual pairing**—where available—gives newcomers a low-stakes oral partner and provides supported translanguaging opportunities when appropriate.

## BICS and CALP: Explicit Language Development

Research on language acquisition is clear: newcomers must develop Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) as the foundation upon which academic language can be built. BICS—the everyday, context-embedded language of social interaction—typically requires one to two years to develop with adequate input and interaction. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)—the decontextualized, academically demanding language of schooling—requires five to seven years.

In middle school newcomer contexts, BICS instruction cannot be deferred. **Oral social English development must happen simultaneously with content instruction, not before it. This ensures that students are not excluded from grade-level inquiry while they are acquiring social fluency.**

**What this looks like in *Threads & Themes*:**

- **Embedded Social English:** Oral English instruction is woven into every classroom routine. Teachers explicitly name and model the language of classroom participation -- requesting clarification ("Can you say that again?"), expressing uncertainty ("I'm not sure, but I think..."), agreeing and disagreeing ("I agree because..."), and naming what they observe in texts ("I see... / I notice...").
- **Oral-First Entry Points:** Newcomers participate in oral language tasks (pointing, signaling, drawing) before they are expected to produce written English. During anchor text read-alouds, newcomers can listen and respond nonverbally before moving to one-word oral responses, then to phrase-level, then to sentence-level. Partner reading structures give newcomers a listening and tracking role that builds comprehension without demanding oral production they are not yet ready for.
- **Home Language Affirmation:** Teachers explicitly affirm home-language as a primary asset.. Students are encouraged to use their home language with a bilingual partner to confirm understanding, work through concepts with , and express ideas before translating to English. Classroom displays, word walls, and anchor charts include home-language equivalents for key vocabulary when the student population warrants it.

### Teacher Tip: Monitoring BICS for Simultaneous Acquisition

To ensure newcomers are developing the foundational **Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS)** required to access grade-level inquiry, educators should monitor for these spontaneous, context-embedded behaviors:

- **Self-Initiated Clarification:** Increasing use of English for social requests and seeking clarification without prompting.
- **Spontaneous Partner Work:** Independent English one-word or phrase-level contributions during collaborative tasks.
- **Navigational Independence:** Ability to follow multi-step classroom directions without peer assistance or translation.

## Technology Tools for Independence and Agency

The following tools support newcomer comprehension and should be made available proactively—not only for students with formal accommodations:

Tool	Purpose	Instructional Application
<b>Google Translate</b> (Conversation Mode)	Real-time oral translation between student and teacher.	Use during live instruction to facilitate two-way communication and immediate clarification.
<b>Bilingual Digital Dictionaries</b> (WordReference, Collins)	Vocabulary lookup with audio pronunciation in home language.	Prioritize dictionaries with audio to support students in connecting oral phonology to written text.
<b>Home-Language TTS</b> (built-in browser accessibility)	Hear anchor text in English while following in home language.	Pair with home-language translations to help students track English prosody while maintaining comprehension.  <i>Note: See Section 3.4 for TTS extension guidance.</i>
<b>Voice-to-Text</b> (Google Docs, built-in OS)	Dictate oral responses in English before developing written fluency.	Reduces writing barriers; allows students to review and edit dictated text as a bridge to independent writing
<b>Digital Picture Dictionaries</b> (Merriam-Webster Visual, Illustrated Oxford)	Visual vocabulary support for Tier 1 and Tier 2 words.	Essential for SIFE students and for concepts with strong visual representations to bypass home-language dependence.

### Teacher Tip: Scaffolds vs. Replacements

Technology tools are scaffolds, not replacements for instruction. Their use should be paired with explicit instruction on when and how to use them, with teachers monitoring whether tools are building independence rather than passive dependence.

## 120-Day Guidance for Newcomers

The first 120 days are structured into four progressive phases to move students towards higher levels of independence.

Phase	Days	Language Focus	Content Focus	Program Entry Points
<b>Phase 1: Orientation and Survival Language</b>	D1–30	<b>Basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS):</b> greetings, classroom directions, requests for help, social vocabulary. Oral only; no formal writing expectation.	School and classroom environment; basic academic routines; introductory unit vocabulary with visual support.	Observe whole-class Launches; participate in nonverbal and one-word partner tasks; access anchor text via bilingual support and TTS; observe D-ELD without production expectation;

<b>Phase 2: Academic Vocabulary and Oral Structure</b>	31–60	Phrase-level oral production with sentence frames; Tier 1 and Tier 2 vocabulary building; listening comprehension with graphic note-taking.	Unit anchor text with home language support); key vocabulary from current unit; text structure naming ("This text is about...").	Partner reading with tracking role; complete vocabulary frames with word bank; participate in echo-read during Fluency Practice; begin D-ELD with full frame support.
<b>Phase 3: Academic Language Production</b>	61–90	Sentence-level oral and written production; academic discussion entry with sentence frames; expanding vocabulary across contexts.	Anchor text comprehension at the idea level; oral retell with scaffolded frames; written sentence responses to comprehension prompts.	Participate in Structured Oral Rehearsal with full frame; contribute one prepared sentence to discussion protocols; write Look Back responses with frame support; full D-ELD participation at Emerging level.
<b>Phase 4: Core Program Integration</b>	91–120	Multi-sentence oral and written production; beginning elaboration; initiating in partner discussions; fading frame dependence.	Grade-level content comprehension with scaffolded access; participation in unit discussion protocols with preparation support.	Full ELA participation with Emerging-level scaffolds from Section 2.5; D-ELD at Emerging level with trajectory toward Expanding; transition formative assessment to determine ongoing support needs.

### Transition Planning and Long-Term Support

At the close of the 120-day window, teachers and support staff should complete a transition review for each newcomer student to determine the most effective path forward. This review should address:

- **Current CA ELD Proficiency Level:** As assessed by ELPAC or interim classroom evidence.
- **Recommended Scaffold Level:** Determining the specific I-ELD supports needed for continued ELA participation.
- **D-ELD Grouping:** Placement for the following unit based on demonstrated linguistic growth.
- **MTSS Coordination:** Identifying any referrals warranted for students not progressing as expected.

**The 120-day plan is a floor, not a ceiling.** Students who need continued intensive support should receive it, while students who exceed expectations should be moved rapidly toward higher levels of independence.

#### Supporting Students with Interrupted Formal Schooling (SIFE)

Newcomers who lack consistent schooling in any language need concurrent literacy instruction alongside language development. The 120-day plan above assumes some prior home language literacy. For SIFE students, coordinate with literacy specialists and the district EL coordinator from enrollment to build a parallel literacy strand, extending the phases above accordingly.

↗ **See also:** *Differentiation Playbook, Section 7 (Newcomer Students)* for detailed newcomer differentiation protocols, discussion participation entry points, and SIFE-specific instructional frameworks.

↗ **See also:** *Section 1 (MTSS Framework)* for MTSS referral criteria and progress monitoring timelines for newcomers.

## 2.8 ML-Adjacent Routines in ELA: Differentiation by Proficiency Level

Several routines in *Threads & Themes* are designed to support all learners but carry particular power for Multilingual Learners when implemented with intentional language scaffolding. These **Integrated ELD (I-ELD)** routines appear across the ELA lesson structure in reading, discussion, and writing contexts.

Making rigorous ELA instruction accessible to Multilingual Learners at all levels of proficiency is essential. I-ELD lessons encourage teachers to differentiate instruction for students of all English proficiency levels, with specific teacher moves provided when heavy oral production is required: in Academic Discussion and Presentation lessons. For other ELA routines, proficiency-level differentiation suggestions are outlined in the tables below.

### Scaffolding Principle

Scaffolds must amplify access to grade-level content and language complexity -- not reduce it. Static scaffolds based on fixed proficiency levels are not a primary strategy. Teachers should fade scaffolds based on formative evidence, and students always work at the edge of their productive zone.

### Structured Oral Rehearsal

Students rehearse a spoken response to a text-based prompt before whole-group sharing.

**Goal:** Move students toward longer, more precise oral language production.

ELD Level	Scaffold	Teacher Move
<b>Emerging</b>	Provide a fully constructed sentence frame with content-specific vocabulary pre-filled. Offer a word bank of 4–6 key terms. Model the complete oral response aloud before students rehearse.	Circulate and listen during rehearsal. Acknowledge oral attempts. Prompt: "Can you add one more word about [concept]?" Accept home-language confirmation of understanding.
<b>Expanding</b>	Provide a partial sentence frame with key connectors (e.g., "Because ___, the author argues ___, which shows ___."). Allow students to select vocabulary from the text independently.	After paired rehearsal, invite students to share with a small group <b>before</b> whole-class sharing to build confidence. Prompt: "What evidence from the text supports that?" Encourage elaboration beyond the frame.

<b>Bridging</b>	Offer an open-ended academic prompt without a frame. Encourage students to use complex sentence structure.	Assign Bridging students as active listeners during peer rehearsal. Ask them to provide one specific feedback comment using a language stem. For example, "I noticed you used ____, which was effective because ____."
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## Fluency Practice

Students read aloud a designated passage for accuracy, prosody, and automaticity. Appears in Work Time B (Units 1 and 3, Grades 6–8) with paired reading structures.

**Goal:** Build decoding fluency and oral language phrasing with grade-level text.

ELD Level	Scaffold	Teacher Move
<b>Emerging</b>	Provide the passage pre-chunked into 2–3 sentence segments with slash notation. Allow echo-read with a partner before independent oral read. Pre-teach 2–3 Tier 2 vocabulary words before reading.	Listen for decoding vs. fluency errors separately. Do not interrupt; note patterns. Use choral repetition for 1–2 key phrases after reading.
<b>Expanding</b>	Provide the unmarked passage. Assign partner roles: one reads while one tracks with a finger. Allow a second read after discussion. Support phrasing with a prosody model if available.	Ask comprehension check-in after reading: "What is the main idea of that section?" If fluency is strong, shift focus to meaning: "Which phrase told you the most about [character/concept]?"
<b>Bridging</b>	Passage read is unscaffolded. Students select one sentence or phrase they find linguistically interesting and prepare to explain why (word choice, sentence structure, meaning effect).	Invite Bridging students to share why they selected their sentence. Use this as a bridge into whole-group discussion of the author's craft. Ask: "What is the author doing with language here?"

## Rebuild the Read

Students reconstruct meaning from a text after an initial reading using sentence-level prompts, visual supports, or oral retell structures. Appears in Unit 3 Work Time B (Grades 6–8).

**Goal:** Develop interpretive and analytical language, not just recall.

ELD Level	Scaffold	Teacher Move
<b>Emerging</b>	Provide a sequencing frame with 3–4 sentence starters aligned to the text structure (e.g., "First, the author explains ____. Then, ____ happens because ____. This matters because ____." Offer illustrated vocabulary cards for key concepts.	Model one complete cycle of the rebuild frame before students attempt it. Check for comprehension of each sentence before moving on. Invite students to say one sentence in their home language, then in English.
<b>Expanding</b>	Offer a graphic organizer with the main idea pre-filled. Students generate 2–3 supporting	Prompt: "What would happen if you removed that detail -- would the

	details using sentence connectors from a provided list ("for instance," "as a result," "in contrast"). Students share their reconstruction with a partner before the group.	meaning change?" Push for causal and comparative language. If a student gives a phrase, extend it: "Say that as a complete sentence."
<b>Bridging</b>	Students use the Juicy Sentence protocol: select one complex sentence from the text that carries significant meaning, analyze word-level and syntactic choices, and reconstruct it in their own words without losing meaning.	Facilitate a share-out of the Juicy Sentence analysis. Use as a formative listening moment -- what language features are students noticing? Feed these insights into the next D-ELD lesson planning.

### Strategic Guidance: Implementing I-ELD Routines

To maximize the impact of these ML-adjacent routines within the core ELA block, keep the following instructional principles in mind:

- **Formative Flexibility:** An ELD level assignment is a **starting point, not a fixed label**. Educators should adjust or "fade" scaffolds based on real-time formative evidence observed during the lesson.
- **Architecture of Access:** These routines are embedded in ELA lessons to provide **Integrated ELD** support. They do not replace the explicit language instruction of **Designated ELD**; rather, they build the linguistic bridge toward it.
- **Visible Language Objectives:** Language goals should be visible and explicitly named for students (e.g., "Today, we are practicing how to use casual language like 'because' and 'therefore' in our oral responses").
- **Cross-Program Synergy:** For D-ELD lesson routines that parallel these ELA moves, see Section 2.6 (ML-Specific Lesson Routines) and the Differentiation Playbook, Section 4.

## 2.9 Reclassification and Post-Reclassification Monitoring

**Reclassification**—the process by which a student exits Multilingual Learner status and is designated **Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP)**—is a significant milestone, but it is not an exit from monitoring. California Education Code and Title III require that RFEP students be monitored for a minimum of two years following reclassification to ensure they are maintaining academic progress without specialized ML supports.

**California's four reclassification criteria must all be met before a student is reclassified:**

- **ELPAC Performance:** At or above the established reclassification threshold.
- **Teacher Evaluation:** Assessment of academic language development across reading, writing, speaking, and listening in content areas.
- **Parent/Guardian Consultation:** Families/caregivers must be informed and have the opportunity to provide input
- **Academic Achievement Measure:** Performance in basic skills (typically state or district assessments in ELA).

## Post-Reclassification Monitoring

RFEP students should be monitored at each grading. If a student shows declining performance in ELA or content areas, the classroom teacher should notify the ELD specialist to determine whether targeted language support is warranted. Reclassification does not preclude re-entry into EL services if monitoring evidence indicates the student is not sustaining progress.

### Teacher Tip: Monitoring RFEP Progress with Formative Evidence

Reclassification is a major milestone, but California law requires two years of proactive monitoring to ensure students maintain academic momentum. Teachers should continue to leverage existing *Threads & Themes* data points to fulfill this requirement:

- **Look Back Responses:** Use these daily formative checks to monitor written academic language development.
- **Discussion Participation:** Observe oral language during seminars to ensure the student is utilizing complex discourse markers without the support of ELD-specific scaffolds.
- **Core Written Tasks:** Analyze unit-end performance tasks for any signs of linguistic plateauing or declining performance in ELA content.

The same tools used to support active Multilingual Learners provide the most reliable continued evidence for RFEP students.

## 2.10 Long-Term English Learners (LTELs)

**Long-Term English Learners (LTELs)** are students who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for six or more years and remain at the Emerging or Expanding proficiency level. Districts are required under California Education Code to provide targeted support for this population. LTELs are a distinct instructional group and should not be conflated with newcomers; their linguistic profile is often the inverse of a newcomer.

### The LTEL Profile

LTELs typically have fully developed Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS)— they are socially fluent and navigate classroom participation and school culture with ease. The challenge is Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). LTELs may have plateaued because years of over-scaffolding has removed the productive challenge required for academic language growth.

### How *Threads & Themes* Supports LTELs

The program's core scaffolding principle—amplify access, do not reduce complexity -- is specifically designed to move LTELs out of plateaus. Educators should apply the following strategies:

- **Fade Scaffolds Intentionally Over Time:** Do not allow an LTEL to remain on Emerging-level sentence frames if formative evidence suggests they can work at the Expanding level. Static

scaffolding is often a contributor to plateauing, not a remedy for it. See Section 2.5 (Proficiency Level Differentiation) for scaffold fading guidance.

- **Prioritize Academic Register:** LTELs often have rich oral language but avoid academic register in formal writing and discussion. Use the Academic Language Progression moves (Section 3.5d) to explicitly bridge social language to formal academic structures.
- **Limit Reliance on Translation:** For students who have been in U.S. schools for six years, the focus must be on sustained exposure to and production of academic English. While home language remains an asset, instructional focus should shift toward English academic registers.

## Section 3: Differentiated Instruction

### 3.1 Overview

Differentiated instruction in *Threads & Themes* is integrated within the lesson architecture to support Universal Access. Every lesson contains structured access points at multiple levels, ensuring all students—including Multilingual Learners and students with disabilities—engage with grade-level complex text and rigorous tasks through a gradual release of responsibility. Teachers utilize formative data to provide responsive scaffolding that amplifies—rather than reduces—instructional rigor.

### 3.2 Embedded Lesson Supports

To support daily instruction, the program utilizes specific supports, including Formative Look-Fors, If/then contingent prompts, and strategic grouping, to allow for real-time adjustments based on student responsiveness:

- **If/Then Contingent Prompts:** Built-in decision trees guide students toward more sophisticated thinking. Example: "If students define only → Prompt: Can you give an example? / If students give examples without vocabulary → Prompt: Which word fits that example?"
- **Graphic Organizers:** Visual tools such as three-column charts, main idea organizers, and annotation scaffolds that help students externalize their thinking and organize complex information.
- **Vocabulary Scaffolds:** Explicit support including morphological analysis (roots and affixes) and cognate recognition to leverage the linguistic assets of Multilingual Learners.
- **Formative Look-Fors:** Strategic checkpoints in each lesson with specific observable behaviors to help teachers assess student performance in real time against specific standards-aligned behaviors and adjust instruction accordingly.
- **Reflection:** Embedded self-assessment routines that allow students to reflect on their own learning and support teachers in identifying areas for growth.

### 3.3 Instructional Grouping Configurations

Strategic grouping allows teachers to calibrate the level of support to student needs while maintaining a cohesive classroom community. The following table outlines how *Threads & Themes* utilizes different configurations to balance direct instruction with collaborative and independent practice:

Configuration	When to Use	Program Examples
<b>Whole group</b>	Launching concepts, modeling, and shared read-alouds	Launch, Literacy Lab instruction
<b>Partner work</b>	Collaborative annotation, oral rehearsal, and peer feedback	Learning in Action Part A
<b>Small group</b>	Targeted skill practice, pre-teaching, or Tier 2 intervention	Teacher-led Huddles during independent work
<b>Individual</b>	Formative writing, exit tickets, and final assessments	Look Back and Performance Tasks

## 3.4 Dyslexia and Multisensory Support

*Threads & Themes* incorporates Structured Literacy principles to support visual accessibility features (e.g., specialized formatting and spacing adjustments) for students with dyslexia characteristics. These multisensory techniques engage simultaneous visual, auditory, and kinesthetic pathways to strengthen phonological processing and decoding. Specific protocols for phonological support include:

- Explicit sound-symbol work
- Extended practice with controlled text
- Repeated exposure to word patterns.

The program emphasizes that while multisensory approaches are a valuable form of multiple representation, they are most effective when paired with explicit, systematic instruction.

### Text-to-Speech (TTS) Accessibility: A Two-Part Design

*Threads & Themes* builds **text-to-speech (TTS)** accessibility into the platform in two complementary ways: one requiring no setup from teachers or families, and a second one leveraging familiar extension tools students may already use. So that students with dyslexia characteristics can access both short instructional texts and longer article-length reading without barriers.

#### Part 1: Built-In TTS for Instructional Text (No Setup Required)

All short-form student-facing instructional texts are delivered on-platform with native text-to-speech and synchronized word-by-word highlighting built directly into the Newsela interface. Students activate TTS within the platform -- no external tool, screen reader, or device configuration is required.

Feature	What It Means for Students
Synchronized highlighting	TTS playback includes word-by-word synchronized highlighting, so students see each word highlighted as it is read aloud. Research shows this dual-input approach (hearing + tracking) produces stronger outcomes for students with dyslexia than audio alone.
No setup required	Native TTS is activated within the platform. Students do not need JAWS, NVDA, VoiceOver, or any external screen reader to access this feature.
Text sizing	All instructional text meets accessibility sizing standards. Students can use browser zoom controls without breaking page layout.

#### Part 2: Extension Compatibility for Article-Length View Page Content

Longer article-length texts on the View Page require synchronized TTS with word-by-word highlighting. Research shows that students with dyslexia benefit most from hearing text while simultaneously seeing each word highlighted (tracking)—not audio alone. *Threads & Themes* is built to be compatible with leading synchronized highlighting extensions:

Extension Tool	Description	Availability
Snap&Read (Don Johnston)	Synchronized word-by-word highlighting with adjustable reading speed, vocabulary support, and text leveling. Google Workspace compatible.	Chrome Web Store
Read&Write for Google (Texthelp)	Dual-color synchronized highlighting, vocabulary tools, study tools, and TTS with speed controls. Widely used in California districts.	Chrome Web Store (free for students)
Kurzweil 3000	Advanced TTS with synchronized highlighting, note-taking, and study tools. Common in IEP and 504 technology accommodations.	Subscription / District-licensed

### Pilot Commitment: Expansion and Validation

Newsela is committed to ensuring full accessibility throughout the pilot period. This commitment is an intentional design decision, not a workaround, and includes two primary focus areas:

- **Expanded Native Coverage:** By October 2026, native TTS with synchronized highlighting will expand to cover all student-facing directions and tasks, including comprehension questions and activity instructions.
- **Extension Validation:** Newsela is committed to validating at least one leading extension tool (such as Snap&Read or Read&Write) for full synchronized highlighting by pilot launch.

**MTSS Progress Support:** The program provides the necessary data frameworks and templates to support teachers in tracking student response to intervention (RtI) within a standard MTSS framework.

### Teacher Tip: Activate TTS Proactively

Students with dyslexia characteristics often struggle long before receiving a formal IEP or 504 plan. You do not need to wait for formal identification to support TTS access.

**Look For:** Students who skip words, substitute similar-looking words, or tire quickly during silent reading.

#### Immediate Actions:

- **Built-in TTS:** Remind all students that their device screen reader can read any instructional prompts aloud at any time.
- **View Page Articles:** Model how to use compatible extensions (e.g., *Snap&Read*, *Read&Write*) for students who lose their place or decode slowly.
- **Coordination:** Confirm that district-licensed tools are activated before the school year begins.

**Strategic Note:** When the goal is *comprehension*, TTS is ideal. When the goal is strengthening independent *decoding*, use TTS more sparingly to ensure students are still practicing their reading skills.

## 3.5 Additional Differentiation Areas

Differentiated support in *Threads & Themes* extends beyond reading access to address the diverse profiles of learners who may struggle with specific dimensions of the ELA standards. The following sections outline instructional strategies for students who face challenges with spelling, comprehension, oral organization, and academic register.

### 3.5a Phonological-Based Spelling Difficulties

This section addresses students whose written output reveals phonological mapping errors – such as representing sounds by feel rather than by convention (e.g., "sed" for "said") – even when their oral comprehension and reading fluency are adequate.

#### Observable Indicators:

- Written responses with phonetically plausible but incorrect spellings, particularly of multisyllabic Tier 2 words.
- Strong oral contributions contrasted with significantly weaker written output.
- Avoidance of complex vocabulary in writing that the student uses confidently in speech.
- Inconsistent spelling of the same word across a single response.

#### Key Program Moves:

- **Assess Content Independently:** Evaluate the quality of written annotations and Look Back responses based on conceptual depth rather than spelling accuracy
- **Prioritize Morphology:** Focus word study on morphological patterns (roots, affixes) over rote memorization as this builds spelling and vocabulary simultaneously.
- **Acknowledge Attempted Use:** When a student uses a phonological approximation of a target vocabulary word, provide the conventional form as a model without marking the response as incorrect.

#### Teacher Tip: The "Oral Check"

If a student's writing is obscured by spelling errors, ask them to read their response aloud. If the thinking is sound, validate the content immediately and use a Sentence Expansion routine during the next Literacy Lab to bridge their oral ideas to standard written forms.

↗ **See also:** *Differentiation Playbook, Section 3.2 (Additional Time and Differentiated Materials), for systematic word study protocols including word sorting, sound-spelling correspondence work, and multisensory spelling practice.*

↗ **See also:** *Section 1 (MTSS Framework) of this handbook for progress monitoring guidance of students whose spelling difficulties are persistent and significant – to initiate MTSS documentation as needed.*

↗ **See also:** *Differentiation Playbook, Section 4.1 (EL-Adjacent Core Routines), for proficiency-level differentiation protocols, and Section 6 (African American English & Language Variation), for AAE-specific spelling and phonological guidance.*

### 3.5b Listening and Reading Comprehension Scaffolds

This section addresses students who decode adequately but struggle to make and sustain meaning from complex text. In *Threads & Themes*, comprehension difficulty shows up most acutely during anchor text read-alouds and whole-class discussion, where students are expected to hold multiple ideas, track text structure, and connect evidence to argument in real time. These students often appear engaged but cannot recall main ideas or distinguish central claims from supporting details.

#### Observable Indicators:

- Retells that are detail-heavy but miss the main idea.
- Confusion when texts use non-linear structures, such as flashbacks, compare-contrast, or problem-solution.
- Difficulty linking discussion contributions to the anchor text.
- Participation drops sharply when texts become more complex mid-unit.

#### Key Program Moves::

- **Explicit Text Structure:** Before read-alouds and sustained reading, name the text structure (e.g., "This text is going to compare two arguments -- listen for what is the same and what is different."). so students know how to organize incoming information.
- **Assigned Listening Roles:** During partner reading, give the student a specific focus (e.g., "Your job is to track the main idea -- not the details").
- **Self-Monitoring Checkpoints: Teach** students to pause after each paragraph and complete the frame: "So far, the author is saying...". When students cannot identify main idea, back up to the sentence level -- ask them to identify the subject and main verb of one sentence as a comprehension anchor.

↗ **See also:** *Differentiation Playbook, Section 3 (Students Approaching Grade Level) and Section 4.2 (Academic Discussion Routine Differentiation) for text structure graphic organizers, active listening protocols, and comprehension monitoring tools.*

↗ **See also:** *Section 6 (Complex Text Access) for program-level complexity guidance.*

### 3.5c Organization and Delivery of Oral Communication

Challenges in this area often stem from executive function and discourse organization. Students may know what they want to say but struggle to assemble ideas into a coherent sequence, especially during Fishbowl Conversations and Socratic Seminar (both of which require real-time, unrehearsed oral organization).

#### Observable Indicators:

- Oral responses that begin confidently but trail off or jump between ideas without a clear connection. Ability to write a coherent argument but inability to reproduce it orally.

- Avoidance of volunteering in protocols that require spontaneous response.
- Frequent word retrieval pauses that are distinct from vocabulary gaps.

#### Key Program Moves:

- **Structured Pre-Drafting:** Built-in pre-speaking planning time for all students—not just those who need it—so the scaffold does not single anyone out. Provide a 60-second written pre-draft window before discussions for students to write the first sentences they intend to say.
- **Retrieval Anchors:** Allow students to bring annotated notes with two or three prepared contributions to Fishbowl and Socratic Seminar routines.
- **Distinguish Retrieval from Organization:** If a student frequently self-corrects mid-sentence ("I mean... the -- the system, not the person"), this points toward retrieval; if they produce fluent but meandering responses, this points toward organization. Both benefit from pre-speaking planning, but persistent word retrieval difficulty may warrant a referral conversation with the school speech-language pathologist.

↗ **See also:** *Differentiation Playbook, Section 3.5c (Organization and Delivery of Oral Communication), for oral planning tools, speech mapping templates, and discussion protocol entry points by support need.*

### 3.5d Academic Language Progression for Students Developing Academic Register

This group includes students whose oral reasoning is strong but whose academic register is underdeveloped. The students are not formally identified as English Learners (EL-classified), but may include long-term Multilingual Learners who were reclassified before reaching full academic language proficiency, students with limited prior exposure to academic discourse, and students whose oral language is rich but whose academic register is underdeveloped.

These students are not served by ML scaffolds alone, nor are they typically identified through MTSS without proactive teacher observation. In *Threads & Themes*, the risk points are high-inference written responses, academic discussion where register matters, and Tier 2 vocabulary demands in the anchor texts.

#### Observable Indicators:

- Written responses that are accurate in content but colloquial in register (e.g., "The guy in the story basically gives up").
- Oral contributions that demonstrate strong reasoning but avoid academic vocabulary the student has encountered in the lesson.
- Difficulty producing written responses beyond one or two sentences despite being able to explain ideas verbally
- Tier 2 vocabulary that appears in anchor texts but is absent from the student's own production.

#### Key Program Moves:

- **Scaffold Fading:** Use the program's sentence frames as an initial support, but treat them as a starting point rather than a fixed level. Students in this group often transition off frames quickly when provided with targeted feedback.
- **Translate the Register:** When a student produces a colloquial response, explicitly name the register and offer a parallel academic version (e.g., "That's the right idea -- here's how we'd say

it in an academic discussion." ). Focus on translating the register without correcting the underlying content.

- **Prioritize Vocabulary Breadth:** Emphasize broad exposure to Tier 2 vocabulary over deep study in early units. Repeated encounters across varied contexts builds language acquisition more reliably than intensive study of a few words.
- **Use Sentence Combining as a Bridge:** In writing, provide students two short accurate sentences and ask them to combine them using a connector from the lesson. This strategy builds syntactic complexity without adding a simultaneous vocabulary burden.

#### Teacher Tip: Use the Expanding ML Scaffolds

Many of the **Expanding-level Integrated ELD scaffolds** (e.g., partial frames with connectors) are ideal starting points for students in this group who need to bridge their oral reasoning to academic writing

↗ **See also:** *Differentiation Playbook, Section 4 (Multilingual Learner Differentiation) for academic language progression frameworks, Tier 2 vocabulary sequencing, and register-bridging protocols.*

↗ **See also:** *Section 2.5 (Proficiency Level Differentiation) for Expanding-level ML scaffolds that are appropriate starting points for this student group.*

## Twice Exceptional Learners

Instructional support in *Threads & Themes* is not a "one-size-fits-all" designation. Some students demonstrate a "Twice-Exceptional" profile, requiring the access scaffolds described in Section 3 while simultaneously possessing the high analytical potential to engage with the extension tasks that will be covered in Section 4.

Teachers should ensure that students receiving accommodations – such as Text-to-Speech or structured pre-drafting—are still monitored for readiness in deeper inquiry. The goal of this program is to provide the necessary architecture of access so that every student can work at the edge of their productive zone.

## Section 4: Advanced Learners

### 4.1 Overview

**Advanced learners** in *Threads & Themes* are students who demonstrate consistent mastery of grade-level ELA standards before or early in instruction. Rather than accelerating to the next grade-level's content, these students are provided with tasks that extend the depth and complexity of their thinking within the unit's inquiry. The program's architecture supports this by ensuring anchor texts are rich enough to sustain multiple levels of analysis simultaneously, and every unit contains built-in extension opportunities within lessons and on designated flex days. Advanced learners engage with the same essential questions, the same texts, and the same discussions as their peers -- but with greater analytical demand, less scaffolding, and greater expectation for independent synthesis.

#### Core Principle: Extension over Acceleration

The goal is to develop the habits of mind—stronger reading, more precise writing, and more rigorous thinking—within the student's current grade level. Moving advanced learners to 9th grade content before they have fully inhabited the depth available in 6th–8th grade content is not the primary goal.

### 4.2 Identifying Advanced Learners: A Formative-First Approach

Advanced learner identification in *Threads & Themes* is formative and ongoing, not fixed at the start of the year. A student may demonstrate advanced performance in literary analysis but not in argument writing; in close reading but not in sustained independent research. Because advanced performance is often task-specific, teachers should identify extension opportunities based on real-time evidence. The following table outlines sources for identifying students ready for extension:

Evidence Source	What to Look For	Program Context
Written Look Back responses	Responses that go beyond the prompt -- analyzing craft, connecting to broader themes, or questioning the author's framing without being asked to	Look Back (end of lesson); annotation tasks during reading
Oral discussion contributions	Unprompted synthesis across texts or units; building on peers' ideas with original elaboration; asking inferential or evaluative questions rather than answering them	Reflect & Response Dialogue; Fishbow conversations; Socratic Seminar
Fluency and annotation	Rapid, accurate decoding with annotations that go beyond identification (e.g., noting irony, analyzing syntax, questioning word choice)	Paired reading; independent annotation during Learning in Action
Vocabulary acquisition	Rapid uptake and spontaneous use of Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary in new contexts within the same lesson	Vocabulary work; class discussion; written responses
Task completion pace	Consistent early completion of core tasks at high quality and conceptual depth	Any independent work time; Learning in Action Part B; Look Backs

### 4.3 Compacting: Making Room for Extension

Curriculum compacting is a responsive instructional move that allows students who have already demonstrated mastery of a skill to bypass redundant core instruction and engage immediately with advanced extension work. In *Threads & Themes*, this optimization is applied at the skill level within individual lessons rather than at the unit level. This ensures that while students are not excused from high-value anchor text engagement or collaborative discussion, they are provided with sophisticated alternatives to explicit skill instruction and guided review that they no longer require.

If the student already demonstrates...	What can be compacted	What replaces it
Fluent decoding and prosody (Fluency Practice)	Echo-read scaffolds and first read with tracking support	Independent first read followed by author's craft analysis of one selected sentence
Strong literal comprehension of anchor text	Graphic organizer completion and main-idea identification tasks	Inferential annotation focusing on what the author implies or intentionally omits
Mastery of target vocabulary (via pre-assessment or early evidence)	Vocabulary matching, definition work, and Tier 2 word study activities	Cross-text vocabulary analysis: tracing how the word is used differently across two unit texts
Proficiency with argument structure in writing	Sentence frame scaffolds and paragraph structure modeling	Multi-paragraph argument with a counter-claim or analysis of a published argument's rhetorical moves
Grade-level discussion skill (citing evidence, elaborating)	Reflect & Response with full sentence frame support	Self-selected discussion roles (facilitator, synthesizer, or devil's advocate) to lead peer inquiry

#### Teacher Tip: Documenting Compacting Decisions

Briefly and consistently document when a student bypasses a core skill for an extension. Add a note in your gradebook or planning identifying which students compacted which specific skills and the task they did instead. This practice creates a reliable record for communication with families and provides essential data to inform future unit planning.

## 4.4 Extension Opportunities: Within Lessons and on Flex Days

Extensions in *Threads & Themes* are available at two points: within every lesson through the Advanced Learner extension prompts in the Teacher Edition (see Section 4.7), and on Flex Days—dedicated instructional time built into the unit structure for enrichment, reteaching, and independent exploration. The following table describes the types of extensions available in the program and where they fit:

Extension Type	Description	Delivery Point
Author's craft analysis	Students move from comprehending what a text says to analyzing why the author made specific language, structure, or form decisions—and how those choices might shape reader perception and engagement	Within-lesson (teacher notes); Flex Day deep dive
Counterclaim and complication	After forming a claim or analysis, students identify the strongest possible counter-argument and address it—developing nuanced argument characteristic of 9th–10th grade writing standards	Within-lesson writing extension; Look Back extension prompt
Cross-text synthesis	Students connect the current anchor text to a previous unit text, a self-selected text, or a historical or contemporary source—identifying thematic, structural, or rhetorical connections	Flex Day; teacher notes extension during Learning in Action
Author study	Students research the author of the anchor text—their biography, other works, stated intentions, reception—and bring that context back to the text to deepen analysis	Flex Day; independent research framework (see 4.5)
Original inquiry project	Student-generated inquiry question connected to the unit's essential question; student designs and carries out their own research or creative response	Flex Day; multi-day independent project
Mentor text writing	Students write an original piece in the style of the anchor text author—using the same structural moves, register, or argument strategy—as a way of inhabiting the craft	Flex Day; within-lesson if time permits after compacting

## 4.5 Independent Research and Self-Directed Learning

Flex Days are the primary window for sustained independent inquiry. The framework below gives advanced learners a structured self-direction cycle that keeps their work connected to the unit's essential question while allowing genuine choice in topic, approach, and form of response. The cycle spans multiple Flex Days within a single unit—it is not a one-session activity.

Cycle Phase	Student Action	Teacher Role
Question (Flex Day 1)	Generate an inquiry question connected to the unit essential question. Questions should be specific, arguable, and genuinely unknown to the student. Example Frame: "I'm wondering whether ____, because ____"	Confer briefly to sharpen the question. Ask: "Is that a question you could answer by looking it up, or does it require you to think it through?" Push for the latter.
Gather (Flex Days 1–2)	Locate and read at least two sources beyond the anchor text. Take annotated notes. Students may use the school library, Newsela text sets, or teacher-curated source banks assembled for each unit.	Identify a curated source bank for each unit in advance. Students with access to school databases should be directed there; others may need teacher-provided texts.
Synthesize (Flex Days 2–3)	Write a synthesis: what do your sources say, what do they disagree about, and what is your own position? This is the intellectual core of the project.	Check in on synthesis writing. Ask: "Where do your sources disagree? Which one do you find most convincing, and why?"
Share (Flex Day 3 or beyond)	Present findings in a form of their choice: a written argument, a short talk to a small group, an annotated bibliography with commentary, or a creative response. The form should match the content.	Facilitate sharing so independent inquiry feeds back into the class—a brief share out at the next whole-class lesson brings independent inquiry back to the whole group.

### Teacher Tip: Metacognitive Research Prompts

Teachers can post these prompts during independent research time to foster student self-direction and critical thinking:

- "What do I know so far, and what am I still unsure of?"
- "Which source am I finding most convincing, and why?"
- "What would someone who disagrees with me say?"

- “Am I answering my own question, or have I found a better question?”

## 4.6 Above-Grade-Level CA CCSS ELA Connections

Extension tasks in *Threads & Themes* are mapped to Grades 9–10 CA CCSS ELA standards. This provides a defensible above-grade-level trajectory for advanced learners in Grades 6–8. The table below identifies key extension standards and the specific program context in which they occur.

Grade 9–10 Standard	Grade-Level Standard Exceeded	Extension Entry Point in Program
<b>RL/RI.9-10.1:</b> Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences; identify where the text is ambiguous	<b>RL/RI.6-8.1:</b> Cite textual evidence	<b>Advanced Learner extension prompt:</b> "Identify one place where the text is ambiguous—where two reasonable readers could disagree. Which interpretation do you find more defensible?"
<b>RL/RI.9-10.6:</b> Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work; consider how authorship shapes meaning	<b>RL/RI.6-8.6:</b> Explain how an author develops point of view	<b>Author study extension</b> (Section 4.4); Flex Day author research project
<b>W.9-10.1a–e:</b> Write arguments with a formal style; introduce and support with valid reasoning; acknowledge and address counter-claims; provide a concluding statement that follows logically	<b>W.6-8.1:</b> Write arguments supported by reasons and evidence	<b>Compacting extension for argument writing</b> (Section 4.3); <b>Look Back written extension prompts</b>
<b>W.9-10.7:</b> Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate	<b>W.6-8.7:</b> Conduct short research projects	<b>Independent research cycle</b> on Flex Days (Section 4.5)
<b>SL.9-10.4:</b> Present information clearly, concisely, and logically; use appropriate eye contact, volume, and pronunciation	<b>SL.6-8.4:</b> Present claims and findings using appropriate facts and relevant details	<b>Discussion facilitator</b> and <b>synthesizer</b> roles; Flex Day share-out presentations
<b>L.9-10.4a–d:</b> Determine or clarify meaning of unknown words using context, morphology, and reference materials; verify inferences	<b>L.6-8.4:</b> Determine meaning of unknown words using context clues	<b>Cross-text vocabulary</b> extension; <b>morphological analysis</b> tasks in word study

## 4.7 In-Depth Study of Authors, Themes, and Concepts

The unit structure of *Threads & Themes* is well-suited to in-depth study since each unit was intentionally organized around a sustained inquiry question and a set of thematically-connected texts. Advanced learners can go deeper into any of three dimensions:

- **Author study:** Move from comprehending what a text says → analyzing what decisions the author consistently makes → examining reception (how the work has been read over time and what that tells us about the moment it was written in). Anchor questions: What are this author's recurring preoccupations? What formal or structural choices do they make consistently?
- **Theme study:** Move from identification ("This text is about identity") → analysis ("Identity in this text is constructed through contrast with 'the other'") → synthesis ("Three of the texts we've read this unit construct identity the same way—but this one complicates it by..."). Can culminate in a student-facilitated small-group discussion.
- **Conceptual depth:** The historical, scientific, social, or philosophical backdrop of each unit can be explored at greater depth through self-directed research. The key is keeping inquiry tethered to the unit essential question so that the student's independent work connects back to the collective learning of the class.

## 4.8 Advanced Learner Supports

Every *Threads & Themes* lesson includes “Ready for Extension” prompts embedded alongside “Additional Student Support” sections in the Teacher Edition. This parallel structure ensures that differentiation for advanced learners is as routine and predictable as support for Multilingual Learners. These prompts tell teachers exactly what to do differently for students ready for greater complexity and independence.

### Components of Advanced Learner Supports

Each set of prompts is calibrated to the specific lesson task and standard. They typically include one or more of the following elements:

Element	Description	Instructional Example
Extension prompt	A higher-order version of the lesson's core question moving from inference toward evaluation, analysis to synthesis, or comprehension to critique.	<b>Core prompt:</b> "What is the author's central claim?" <b>Extension prompt:</b> "Is the author's argument more powerful because of what they include, or what they leave out? Defend your position."
Craft analysis task	A focused task asking students to analyze a specific decision the author made (word choice,	"Ask students to select one sentence from today's passage that you think is doing more than one

	syntax, structure, form, or perspective) and explain its effect	job at once. What is it accomplishing, and how?"
Compacting signal	A brief note to the teacher indicating which portion of the lesson can be bypassed by students who demonstrate mastery, and what to do instead	If a student completes the graphic organizer with a strong main idea and evidence in the first 5 minutes, move directly to the extension.
Flex Day connection	A pointer to the unit's Flex Day extension menu, identifying which activity connects most naturally to the day's learning.	"This lesson connects to the Author Study extension. Flex Day 2 prompts are available in the unit extension bank."

### Teacher Guidance: Planning for Extension

Advanced Learner supports are written for every lesson in every unit.

- **Preview during planning:** Review these prompts before instruction to identify which students are likely candidates for extension and prepare any necessary materials in advance.
- **Avoid ad-hoc use:** Treat the set of prompts as a strategic planning tool rather than just an in-the-moment instructional guide.

↗ **See also:** *Differentiation Playbook, Section 5 (Advanced Learners) for advanced learner differentiation protocols, choice boards, and author/theme study frameworks.*

↗ **See also:** *Section 1 (MTSS Framework) for connections to MTSS gifted education identification and service models.*

## Section 5: AAE & Language Variation

### 5.1 Introduction

The English language has many dialects—variations in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar often localized to a region or group of people. *Threads & Themes* takes an asset-based approach to all linguistic variations, recognizing that diversity strengthens learning.

African American English (AAE) is a fully rule-governed linguistic system with consistent phonological, morphosyntactic, and pragmatic features; it is a valid language variety, not "broken" English or slang. Over 2 million Black residents of California speak AAE, and hundreds of thousands of students navigate dialect mismatch during reading instruction annually. The goal of this section is to provide a "linguistic lens" that affirms a student's home dialect while adding the academic register as a strategic tool for power and expression.

#### SBAC 2025 Data

61% of White 8th graders met or exceeded grade-level standards vs. 32% of Black 8th graders. Dialect-related cognitive load contributes to this achievement gap.

### 5.2 Features of African American English

The tables below identify frequently observed AAE phonological and morphosyntactic features to provide teachers with linguistic context. These are not checklists for correction; rather they are tools to help teachers recognize consistent, rule-governed patterns of language variety. Teachers should use this knowledge to inform responsive feedback that focuses on rhetorical purpose rather than deficit-based editing.

#### Phonological Features

Phonological features represent the systematic sound patterns of AAE. Understanding these shifts allows teachers to provide targeted, responsive support in phonics and spelling instruction. By recognizing that these variations are linguistic markers rather than decoding deficits, teachers can help students bridge their primary phonological patterns with the orthographic expectations of the academic register.

Feature	Description	Example
Consonant Cluster Reduction	Multiple consonants at end of word realized as a single sound	"desk" → "des"
-G Reduction	The 'g' in '-ing' sometimes dropped	"jumping" → "jumpin"
Th- Replacement	Initial 'th' → 'd'; medial/final 'th' → 'f', 'v', or 't'	"this" → "dis"; "with" → "wit"
Dropped R	'r' in middle or end of word dropped	"four" → "foe"
Consonant Cluster Movement	'sk' transposed to 'ks'	"ask" → "aks"

### Morphosyntactic Features

Morphosyntactic features represent the systematic grammar of AAE. Recognizing these structures allows teachers to engage students in code-meshing dialogues, helping them choose when to deploy home-language markers for narrative voice and when to use academic markers for formal argumentation.

Feature	Description	Example
Variable -s Marking	Final 's' dropped from plurals, verbs, possessives	"three cat_"; "my uncle_ car"
-Ed Dropping	'-ed' dropped from past tense	"He fix_ the car"
Variable Subject-Verb Agreement	Subjects and verbs don't always match	"They was eating"
Habitual Be	'be' marks recurring or habitual action	"He be eating cookies" (ongoing habit, not right now)
BIN-Stressed (Stressed Been)	Stressed "been" = distant past, possibly ongoing	"I been knowing how to read"
Variable Use of "To Be"	Some forms of 'to be' dropped	"This ___ my red car"

### 5.3 AAE vs. Dyslexia: A Comparison

Distinguishing between rule-governed dialectal variation and a true reading disability is a critical component of equitable ELA instruction. While African American English (AAE) features and dyslexia characteristics can appear similar on the surface, they are driven by fundamentally different linguistic processes.

The following comparison provides teachers with a "linguistic lens" for observation, ensuring that students are neither penalized for their natural speech patterns nor overlooked if they require legitimate intervention.

Task	AAE Speaker	Student with Dyslexia
<b>Decoding "ask"</b>	May say "aks" (consonant cluster metathesis); correctly identifies the first sound as /ă/ and demonstrates word recognition.	Struggles to identify the first sound regardless of pronunciation; word recognition is effortful and inconsistent.
<b>Phonemic Awareness</b>	Consistent, rule-governed patterns (e.g., "hand" → "han,"); rhyming is intact with AAE phonology.)	Inconsistent errors across tasks; difficulty segmenting or manipulating sounds in any dialect.
<b>Rhyming</b>	Produces rhymes based on AAE phonology using consistent sound patterns (e.g., final cluster reduction: "han/man")	Difficulty recognizing or producing rhymes in any dialect; errors are not systematic
<b>Oral Reading Fluency</b>	Reads fluently in their own dialect with accurate word recognition; pronunciation may differ from General American English but reading is smooth and meaning is intact.	Oral reading is effortful, choppy, and slow; word recognition breaks down even on familiar words; frequent self-correction

#### When Both Profiles Are Present

In practice, a student can be an AAE speaker and also have dyslexia characteristics. African American students who use AAE are often disproportionately under-identified for dyslexia because dialect features are misread as decoding errors, while actual decoding errors are attributed to dialect variation.

The key diagnostic signal is **consistency**:

- **Dialectal patterns** are consistent and the student may self-correct in ways that suggest they "heard" the mismatch.
- **Processing deficits** involve inconsistent errors that often go unnoticed by the student, appearing even on words within the student's own dialect.

If uncertainty persists, observe the student across multiple tasks and contexts before drawing conclusions. "Additional support" may include targeted classroom intervention or consultation with an MTSS team; it does not automatically necessitate a referral for special education evaluation. Ensure any evaluator is familiar with AAE and uses instruments that do not penalize dialect features as errors.

## 5.4 Instructional Principles

Equitable instruction for bidialectal and multilingual learners requires a shift from a deficit-based "correction" mindset to an additive "expansion" mindset. The goal is to honor the linguistic resources students bring to the classroom while explicitly teaching the academic register as a tool for broader communication and power.

1. **Recognize AAE as a legitimate, rule-governed dialect** -- not a deficit or slang.
2. **Verify comprehension over pronunciation:** When a student reads "cold" as "cole," check for understanding by asking them to point to a visual or use the word in a context-rich sentence. If the meaning is clear, the student has successfully decoded.
3. **Guide referral decisions using error patterns:** Consistent, rule-governed patterns suggest dialect variation; inconsistent, unpredictable errors suggest a possible processing deficit.
4. **Distinguish variation disability:** Explicitly separate dialectal differences from phonological processing deficits before referring students to MTSS.
5. **Focus on additive skills:** Provide explicit instruction in academic English (General American English) as an additive skill rather than a replacement for a student's home dialect.
6. **Acknowledge cognitive load:** Understand that bidialectal and multilingual students manage multiple language systems simultaneously, which increases cognitive load during reading; this is a sign of sophisticated cognitive work, not a reading disability.
7. **Monitor integrated progress:** Track student advancement toward integrated language and content objectives simultaneously when monitoring progress on indicators associated with reading difficulties.

### ML and Dyslexia: Distinguishing Language Acquisition from Reading Disability

Just as with AAE, teachers face a parallel and equally important diagnostic challenge when working with Multilingual Learners (MLs): distinguishing typical second-language acquisition from a phonological processing deficit. Failure to separate these profiles leads to both the over-identification of MLs for special education and the under-identification of those who genuinely have dyslexia.

**The practical classroom picture:** A student acquiring English may show slow decoding, inconsistent word recognition, difficulty with phonological tasks in English, and below-grade reading performance. These are also signs of dyslexia. The critical differentiator is consistency across languages and over time.

Profile	Language Acquisition	Dyslexia Characteristics
Phonological processing in English	Difficulty, especially with sounds absent in home language; improves with language exposure and instruction	Persistent, inconsistent difficult within tasks; resistant to improvement with language instruction alone
Phonological processing in home language	Intact or stronger; student manages sound tasks in home language	Difficulty present across languages, including home language; not resolved by increased exposure
Trajectory over time	Reading and phonological skills improve as English proficiency develops	Progress is slower than expected given language instruction; decoding difficulties persist despite adequate instruction
Word recognition	Builds over time with increased vocabulary and print exposure	Effortful and inconsistent even on high-frequency words encountered repeatedly

### The Role of Native Language Assessment

When an ML student is being considered for a reading disability evaluation, assessment in the student's dominant or native language is required under IDEA. Evaluating a student's phonological processing only in English often produces misleading results. Dyslexia may be identified in students who are simply acquiring English typically, or dyslexia may be missed in students whose English-language difficulties mask underlying phonological deficits that would be visible if tested in their home language. Any referral must include a review of first-language literacy and, where feasible, a native language phonological assessment conducted by a school psychologist and MTSS coordinator.

### Supporting Students with Dual-Identified Needs

Students who are both ML and have dyslexia characteristics require simultaneous language development support and structured literacy intervention. These approaches are not in conflict. Explicit, systematic, and multisensory instruction is effective for MLs with dyslexia and does not require waiting for English proficiency before beginning intervention. Coordination between the ELD specialist and any Tier 2/Tier 3 intervention providers is essential for parallel progress.

↗ **See also:** *Section 5.3 (AAE vs. Dyslexia) for the parallel diagnostic framework.*

↗ **See also:** *Section 1.6 (Dyslexia-Specific Considerations) for RAN assessment guidance and decoding-specific progress monitoring tools.*

↗ **See also:** Section 1 (MTSS Framework) for referral and escalation protocols.

## 5.5 AAE: Contrastive Analysis

Contrastive analysis is the instructional practice of placing African American English (AAE) and Standard American English (SAE) structures side by side, explaining the rules of each without ranking one as superior. The goal is to expand students' repertoire through **code-meshing**—a rhetorical choice where students learn to knowledgeably switch or blend registers based on audience and purpose.

The features below are not errors; they are systematic, predictable, and linguistically valid components of a rule-governed variety of American English.

Feature Area	AAE Feature (Systematic Rule)	SAE Academic Equivalent	Classroom Approach
Phonological	Consonant cluster reduction at syllable end: 'fist' → 'fis,' 'cold' → 'col,' 'test' → 'tes.' /th/ → /f/ word-finally ('tooth' → 'toof') or /d/ word-initially ('the' → 'de'). -ing → -in ('running' → 'runnin'). Post-vocalic /r/ vocalization ('car' → 'cah').	Full cluster in writing; 'tooth,' 'the,' '-ing' endings in academic writing.	Do not mark phonological features as spelling errors in oral production. In writing, use contrastive analysis: 'In everyday speech we often say ____, and in academic writing we write ____.'
Morphological	Habitual 'be' (aspectual marker): 'She be tired' = she is habitually, regularly tired -- a distinction SAE cannot make with a single word. Copula deletion in present tense: 'She tired' = 'She is tired' (only in present, never in past -- this is a systematic rule, not random omission). Third-person -s absence: 'He walk.' Past tense -ed phonological reduction. Possessive -s absence: 'John hat.' Multiple negation: 'I don't know nothing.'	'She is usually tired.' 'She is tired.' 'He walks.' 'He walked.' 'John's hat.' 'I don't know anything.'	Teach that habitual 'be' carries a meaning SAE cannot replicate -- this is a complexity students bring. Contrastive analysis (not correction) for copula, -s, and negation: 'In AAE this is grammatically correct. In academic writing, the convention is...' Frame code-switching as a skill, not a remediation of an error.
Syntactic	Negative concord (multiple negation is grammatically required in AAE, not optional): 'Nobody didn't	'Nobody saw anything.' 'I did that a long time ago.' 'There's a dog outside.'	Recognize negative concord as a sophisticated grammatical rule -- students are applying it consistently.

	<p>see nothing.' Remote past 'been': 'I been done that' = I did that a long time ago. Existential 'it': 'It's a dog outside' = 'There's a dog outside.' It-clefting for emphasis: 'It was her that left.'</p>	<p>'She was the one who left.'</p>	<p>Explicitly teach SAE negation as an alternative register. Affirm that remote past 'been' marks a meaning English doesn't have a clean equivalent for. Contrastive analysis, never correction.</p>
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### Note on Dialect and Language Disorders

AAE features should never be interpreted as indicators of language delay, disorder, or limited proficiency. A student using AAE consistently and systematically is demonstrating mastery of a complete linguistic system. If a referral for language assessment is being considered, the evaluation must be conducted by a specialist familiar with AAE, using instruments that do not penalize AAE dialect features as errors.

## Section 6: Complex Text Access

### 6.1 Read-Aloud Rationale

Teacher-led read-alouds of complex texts serve as a powerful instructional tool to build background knowledge and model fluent reading. Read-aloud text selections should exceed students' independent reading levels but remain accessible through teacher-facilitated support. To maximize engagement and conceptual understanding, read-alouds should be accompanied by illustrations, graphics, and visual supports.

### 6.2 Text Selection Guidance

Selecting appropriate texts is essential for maintaining rigor while ensuring access. Texts are evaluated using a multi-dimensional model of complexity:

- **Quantitative:** Lexile level and sentence-level complexity.
- **Qualitative:** Analysis of text structure, language demands, and conceptual depth.
- **Reader and Task:** Considerations of required background knowledge and prior reading experiences.

For Grades 6–8, appropriate read-aloud choices include informational texts, literary nonfiction, graphic novels (e.g., *March: Book One*), and primary sources. Selections should be culturally relevant and reflect diverse perspectives and experiences.

### 6.3 Scaffolding During Read-Aloud

Scaffolding must amplify access to language complexity without reducing the cognitive demand of the task. Use the following strategies across the read-aloud cycle:

- **Pre-read:** Activate prior knowledge using brief prompts or images to build necessary context before reading begins.
- **During reading:** Pause at complex vocabulary or syntax; utilize **think-alouds** to model comprehension strategies and metacognition.
- **After reading:** Facilitate discussion through structured protocols (e.g., Turn-and-Talk, Think-Pair-Share, Gallery Walk) to ensure equitable participation.

#### Targeted Read-Aloud Supports

- **For Multilingual Learners:** Preview key vocabulary before the read-aloud and utilize **sentence frames** during discussion to support academic language production.
- **For Students with Dyslexia Characteristics:** Provide a physical or digital copy of the text so students can follow along; encourage the use of tracking tools (e.g., a finger or ruler) to maintain focus.

## Section 7: School—Home Communication

### 7.1 Introduction

Partnerships with families are essential to student success in *Threads & Themes*. Strong school–home communication ensures that families understand what students are learning, how they can support that learning at home, and what to expect from the program. Regular, multilingual communication demonstrates respect for students' families and cultures, builds trust, and creates shared ownership of student achievement.

### 7.2 Homework Expectations and Home Support Guide

Many families—particularly newcomer families—want to support their student's learning but may feel uncertain about how to help with English schoolwork. To bridge this gap, *Threads & Themes* provides a family-facing guide that teachers can send home at the start of each unit. It is written to be accessible to all families regardless of English proficiency, focusing on meaningful home support that does not require English fluency. These letters are available in English and translated into multiple languages in the **Family and Community Engagement Caregiver Guide**.

#### What homework looks like in *Threads & Themes*:

Homework is typically reading-based or reflection-based rather than long written assignments. Students may be asked to pre-read or re-read a passage from class, answer two or three questions in writing, review vocabulary, or prepare a few ideas for a class discussion. Homework assignments are designed to take approximately 20–30 minutes. When specific tasks are not assigned, 20-30 minutes of independent reading is the expected standard.

### 7.3 Roles and Responsibilities

Shared understanding of roles reduces confusion and builds trust. Families, particularly newcomer families unfamiliar with U.S. school systems, benefit from a clear, plain-language explanation of who does what. The table below can be shared directly with families, adapted as a single-page handout, or used as the basis for a family orientation meeting.

Role	Responsibilities	How Families Can Partner
<b>Student</b>	Attend class every day. Complete homework and reading assignments. Participate in discussions—try, even when it's hard. Ask the teacher for help when needed. Bring materials to class. Treat classmates and teachers with respect.	Ask your student daily: 'What did you learn today?' Celebrate effort, not just grades. Help your student get to school on time. Make sure your student has a quiet place and time for homework.
<b>Teacher</b>	Teach grade-level skills every day. Provide materials and scaffolding so all students can access the work. Give regular feedback on student progress. Contact families when a student is struggling. Make families feel welcome to reach out with questions.	Contact the teacher early before problems grow. Let the teacher know if something is happening at home that might affect your student's learning. Share information about your student's strengths, interests, and history that can help the teacher support them.

<b>ELD Staff</b>	Provide additional language development support. Coordinate with classroom teachers on scaffolding and accommodation plans. Monitor English language development progress. Support newcomer students during the 120-day transition period.	Attend meetings with ELD staff. Ask how your student's English is developing and share observations from home; if your student is using more English at home, that's progress worth reporting.
<b>Administrator</b>	Ensure students have the resources and environment they need to succeed. Communicate school-wide expectations and events. Support teachers in implementing the program. Resolve concerns that cannot be addressed at the classroom level.	Attend school events and orientations. Review school communications. Contact the office if you have a concern that is not being addressed.

## 7.4 Program Overview for Families: What Is *Threads & Themes*?

Ensure that families receive a program overview of *Threads & Themes* in plain, accessible language. This document is designed for Back-to-School Night, in a welcome packet, or sent home at the start of the school year. Teachers can find this document in English and translated in multiple other languages in the **Family and Community Engagement Caregiver Guide**.

## 7.5 Communication Calendar and Touchpoints

Consistent, predictable communication—not just crisis-driven outreach—builds the trust that makes families genuine partners. The following schedule represents the minimum recommended touchpoints for school-home communication in *Threads & Themes*, with notes on which communications should be multilingual and which families require priority outreach.

When	Communication	Priority Outreach	Language Access
<b>Start of Year</b>	Welcome letter (Section 7.2), program overview (Section 7.4), and Unit 1 Home Support Guide (Section 7.2)	All families; Newcomer families receive a phone call or in-person welcome as well	All six translated languages; request an interpreter if needed
<b>Weekly</b>	<b>Weekly Highlights:</b> A brief, positive note celebrating something student risks, growth, or successes.	All families	Send in home language when translated version is available
<b>Start of Unit</b> (3–4 times per year)	Updated Home Support Guide with unit topic, essential question, and home conversation prompts	All families	Send in home language when translated version is available
Within first 3 weeks for newcomer students	Newcomer family check-in: How is your student settling in? Are there any questions about school routines or expectations?	Newcomer families only	Interpreter arranged; do not rely on student as interpreter

When a student is struggling (ongoing)	Direct outreach to family: specific observation, specific support being provided, specific ask of the family	Any family whose student is below expected progress	Interpreter arranged if needed; communicate in family's home language
Report card / progress report cycles	Brief written summary of student's current strengths and areas for growth in ELA, in family-friendly language	All families	Translation supported for ML families through district ML coordinator
End of year	Summary of student's growth in reading, writing, discussion, and (for ML students) English language development over the year	All families; ML families receive a separate ELD progress summary	All six translated languages for EL family summaries

#### **Instructional Note: Professional Interpreters**

Interpreter access is a legal right, not a courtesy. Families of Multilingual Learners must have access to a professional interpreter for any school meeting concerning their student's education. Do not ask students to interpret for their own families; this places an inappropriate burden on the student and risks inaccuracy on matters with legal and educational implications.

## Section 8: Accommodations & Accessibility

### 8.1 Overview

Every student using *Threads & Themes* deserves equitable access to grade-level content and instruction. For students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and Section 504 Accommodation Plans, this access is a legal right. Implementation is the collective responsibility of every classroom teacher, supported by special education staff.

This section provides guidance for implementing accommodations within the *Threads & Themes* program, describes the program’s built-in accessibility features, and identifies where general-education and special-education staff should coordinate so accommodations are not only documented, but implemented consistently.

The platform architecture, lesson structure, and supplementary materials described in this section are built to make support practical and consistently available, ensuring that accommodations are integrated into the daily rhythm rather than dependent on teacher improvisation.

### 8.2 IEP and 504 Accommodations and Modifications: Key Distinctions

An IEP accommodation is developed under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and specifies changes in how a student with a qualifying disability accesses instruction or demonstrates learning—not a change in the grade-level standard itself. A Section 504 accommodation similarly adjusts access for students whose disability substantially limits a major life activity (including learning) but who do not qualify for special education services. Both types of plans specify accommodations: intentional changes to the environment, materials, or delivery that allow a student to access the same content and expectations as peers.

#### Key Distinction: Accommodations vs. Modifications

- **Accommodations** change how a student learns. They include adjustments to the environment, materials, or delivery (e.g., extended time, Text-to-Speech) that allow access to the same grade-level standard as peers.
- **Modifications** change what a student learns. They involve reductions in the complexity or scope of the grade-level standard itself (e.g., simplified text, reduced writing expectations, lowered performance criteria). Modifications are IEP team decisions and must be documented accordingly.

In *Threads & Themes*, the built-in scaffold architecture—including sentence frames, graphic organizers, language bridges, and if/then prompts—allows most accommodations to be delivered within the core lesson without altering the rigor of the task. When a modification is required, the IEP team should identify which lesson components are modified and ensure that the student’s IEP reflects those decisions.

### 8.3 Common Accommodations and *Threads & Themes* Implementation

The table below identifies the five common accommodation categories recognized in California, and explains how *Threads & Themes* supports the implementation of each. Teachers should cross-reference this table with each student’s specific IEP or 504 documentation; these program supports describe what is available, not what has been formally assigned to any individual student.

Category	What It Means	How <i>Threads &amp; Themes</i> Supports
<b>Presentation</b>	How information is presented (e.g., read-aloud, enlarged text, visual supports)	Built-in TTS for instructional text; anchor text read-aloud in every lesson; graphic organizers and visual annotation tools
<b>Response</b>	How the student demonstrates learning (e.g., oral response, dictation, reduced writing, multiple-choice alternatives)	Oral Look Backs accepted in place of written; Voice-to-Text compatible; sentence frames for scaffolding; teachers may scribe for students per IEP; discussion protocols include verbal options at all levels
<b>Setting</b>	Where or with whom the student receives instruction or completes assessments (e.g., small group, separate room, preferential seating)	Small-group and partner structures built into every lesson; teacher-led small groups allow for pull-asides; lesson materials available digitally for separate setting delivery
<b>Timing &amp; Scheduling</b>	Adjustments to time or schedule (e.g., extended time, breaks, chunked assignments)	Lessons structured in discrete phases that can be paused and resumed; no single task requires uninterrupted extended production; exit tickets and Look Backs are brief by design
<b>Materials &amp; Equipment</b>	Specialized tools (e.g., calculator, spellchecker, anchor charts, word wall, digital dictionaries)	Platform compatible with browser-based AT (spellcheck, grammar assist, dictionary extensions); word walls and anchor charts referenced in lesson plans; digital vocabulary tools available; multilingual article support for pre-reading
<b>Behavior &amp; Support</b>	Positive behavior supports, check-ins, or sensory supports as specified in IEP	Lesson structure predictability supports students needing routine; Confidence Continuum self-assessment embedded in lessons; partner and small-group configurations reduce whole-class performance pressure; flexible seating compatible with lesson design

## 8.4 Universal Design for Learning and the Program Architecture

*Threads & Themes* is built on **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** principles, ensuring that flexibility is embedded into the program’s core design rather than treated as a peripheral add-on. By providing multiple pathways for students to interact with grade-level inquiry, the program reduces the logistics and stigma of individual accommodation delivery, supporting a proactive model of **Universal Access**.

In alignment with the California ELA/ELD Framework, the program operationalizes the three pillars of UDL as follows:

UDL Principle	Definition	<i>Threads &amp; Themes</i> Example
<b>Multiple Means of Representation</b>	Provide information in more than one format so all students can access grade-level content	Anchor text delivered via read-aloud AND print; vocabulary presented with definitions, morphological breakdown, and usage in context; graphic organizers parallel verbal instruction
<b>Multiple Means of Action &amp; Expression</b>	Provide options for how students demonstrate what they know	Oral and written response options in Look Back and discussion protocols; sentence frames scaffold written production; partner talk precedes whole-group response
<b>Multiple Means of Engagement</b>	Provide options for how students are motivated and sustained in learning	Inquiry-based essential questions connect to student experience; choice in discussion role (facilitator, analyst, synthesizer); Confidence Continuum builds metacognitive self-direction

### Legal Compliance

UDL is a design framework, not an accommodation checklist. While these features support all learners, when a student’s IEP specifies a specific accommodation, that accommodation remains a legal requirement. The UDL architecture provides a high-quality baseline of access, but it is not a substitute for the documented, intentional implementation of legally-mandated supports.

## 8.5 Platform Accessibility Features

The Newsela platform includes built-in and extension-compatible accessibility features that support students with disabilities across the range of *Threads & Themes* activities. The key features relevant to accommodations and accessibility are:

- **Built-in TTS for instructional text:** All short student-facing instructional text -- directions, prompts, sentence frames, annotations -- is delivered in screen reader-compatible format. Students using JAWS, NVDA, VoiceOver, or Chrome Accessibility features access these texts alongside peers with no setup required.

- **Synchronized TTS for article-length text:** The View Page (article content) is compatible with Snap&Read, Read&Write for Google, and Kurzweil 3000, which provide synchronized word-by-word highlighting. This is the accommodation most frequently specified in IEPs for students with dyslexia, reading disabilities, or visual processing differences. See Section 3.4 of this handbook for full implementation guidance.
- **Text sizing and zoom:** All instructional text meets accessibility sizing standards and remains functional with browser zoom controls, supporting students with visual impairments or low vision.
- **Keyboard navigation:** The platform supports keyboard-only navigation for students who cannot use a mouse or trackpad, including students with physical disabilities or motor impairments.
- **Voice-to-text:** Students may use device or browser-based voice-to-text to complete written responses in Google Docs or platform-compatible writing tools, supporting students with physical disabilities, dysgraphia, or writing-related IEP goals. See Section 2.7 for newcomer-specific guidance on voice-to-text as a language scaffold.

The platform and assessment design ensure that language proficiency is not a barrier to demonstrating content mastery, aligning with both universal and designated supports.

↗ **See also:** *Navigation Guide, Section 7 (Student Digital Experience) for a complete description of accessibility features in the student digital experience, see the Navigation Guide, Section 7.*

## 8.6 Coordination with Special Education Staff

Effective accommodation delivery in any program requires communication between general-education and special-education staff before, during, and after instruction. In *Threads & Themes*, the following coordination points are recommended:

- **Before the unit begins:** Review each student’s IEP or 504 to identify accommodations that affect lesson delivery in *Threads & Themes*—particularly those related to reading access, writing production, response format, and setting. Cross-reference with Section 8.3 to identify program supports already available. Note any accommodations that require additional materials or setup (e.g., activating a TTS extension, preparing a printed anchor text copy, arranging a small-group setting).
- **During instruction:** Ensure accommodations are implemented consistently across all phases of the lesson—not only during formal assessments. A student with a read-aloud accommodation needs that support during Launch, Literacy Lab, and Learning in Action, not only during Look Back. Special education co-teachers or paraeducators should have a shared understanding of which lesson phase is underway and which accommodations apply.
- **After instruction:** Progress monitoring for students with IEPs is documented separately from classroom formative assessment—but the two should inform each other. If a student is not making expected progress despite consistent accommodation delivery, initiate a conversation with the IEP team and refer to Section 1 of this handbook (MTSS Framework) for escalation guidance. Do not wait for an annual review.
- **Cross-reference:** For MTSS referral and progress monitoring protocols for students with disabilities, see Section 1. For dyslexia-specific instructional guidance, see Sections 3.4 and 3.5a. For advanced learners with twice-exceptional profiles (i.e., students who are both gifted and have a disability), see Section 4 and coordinate with both gifted education and special education staff.

### **Teacher Tip: Review Accommodations Before the Unit Begins**

Do not wait until a student struggles to locate their IEP accommodations. Before each new unit, pull each student's IEP or 504 and identify the three to five accommodations most relevant to ELA instruction. Write them next to the student's name in your lesson planning materials—not just in a shared drive folder you'll check "when needed."

The most commonly missed accommodations in ELA are: (1) extended time—students need it during Look Back and written responses, not only during formal assessments; (2) read-aloud—applies to anchor text AND to instructional prompts, not only to tests; and (3) graphic organizer—the lesson may already include one, but ensure the student knows they are specifically entitled to it and that it is available digitally or in print.

If you are unsure whether a program feature satisfies a specific accommodation, ask the student's case manager—do not assume the built-in scaffold is equivalent to the documented accommodation without confirmation.