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Introduction

The Alternate Louisiana Connectors for English Learners (Alt EL Connectors) were developed for English Learners (ELs) with significant cognitive disabilities. ELs with significant disabilities are students who have been identified by Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams as having significant disabilities and by the English Language Proficiency Screener (ELPS) as needing English development services. They are a diverse group of students who, for the purpose of developing the Alt EL Connectors, are defined as students

- who are progressing toward English language proficiency;
- whose primary home languages are other than English; and
- who have one or more disabilities that significantly affect their cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior¹

Rationale and Purpose

The Alt EL Connectors are the result of a cross-disciplinary effort to support states and other education entities as they work to meet the federal requirement to develop alternate assessments of English language proficiency (ELP) for ELs with significant cognitive disabilities². The Alt EL Connectors, measured by the alternate EL assessments, must be relevant and appropriate for ELs with significant cognitive disabilities, in addition to being rigorous, coherent, measurable, and linked to grade-level expectations³.

The Alt EL Connectors presented in this document were developed with explicit consideration of the range of learners who make up the ELs with significant cognitive disabilities student population. The Alt EL Connectors are further intended to support these students as they learn critical English language knowledge and skills and communicative competence needed to access and meaningfully engage in and succeed in social and academic contexts in the same way as students with significant cognitive disabilities who are not ELs.

The EL Connectors should be part of the planning, discussion, collaboration, and documentation of the student's IEP and an EL specialist should be a member of the IEP team for ELs with significant disabilities.

¹ (Christensen, Gholson, & Shyyan, 2018; Thurlow, Liu, Goldstone, Albus, & Rogers, 2018)

² ESEA section 1111(b)(2)(G); 34 CFR § 200.6(h)(1), (5)

³ESEA section 1111(b)(2)(G); 34 CFR § 200.6(h)(1), (5)

Development of the Alt EL Connectors

The Alt EL Connectors are very similar to the LA Connectors for ELs, and similar guiding principles were used in their development with the addition of: special needs, access supports and accommodations, multimedia and technology, neutral approach, and collaboration between the EL specialists and special education service providers.

Special Needs-ELs with significant cognitive disabilities have both English language development and disability-related needs⁴. These students can benefit from English language development services that are specific to the individual child. Students may take slightly different paths toward ELP. Additionally, these students may access information and demonstrate ELP knowledge and skills differently.

Access Supports and Accommodations-Like all students with disabilities, ELs with significant cognitive disabilities have the right to receive instruction in the least restrictive environment with access to supports and accommodations as determined by the IEP team. When identifying the access supports and accommodations that should be considered for these students, the IEP process should be used to consider communication needs in relation to receptive and productive modalities.

Multimedia and Technology-New understandings of literacy (e.g., visual and digital literacies) have emerged around use of information and communication technologies⁵. Relevant, strategic, and appropriate multimedia tools and technology, aligned to the Alt EL Connectors and consistent with the learning and instructional experiences of the students, should be integrated, as appropriate considering the student's current modes of communication (e.g., augmentative and alternative communication (AAC)).

Neutral Approach-As mentioned previously, the focus of the Alt EL Connectors is on English language knowledge and skills that English learners with significant cognitive disabilities need to develop in order to engage and participate in instruction in classrooms where English is the language of instruction

Collaboration-Supporting ELs with significant cognitive disabilities' communication success requires collaboration to set high, realistic expectations. The Alt EL Connectors are designed for collaborative use by English as second language/English language development and content-area instruction.

Organization

The Alt EL Connectors are organized similarly to the [LA Connectors for ELs](#).

- Alt EL Connectors are specified for each of six grade levels/grade bands: Kindergarten, grade 1, and grade bands 2-3, 4-5, 6-8, and 9-12.
- The ten Alt EL Connectors are common across the grade levels/grade bands. The Alt EL Connectors reflect the language necessary for ELs to engage in the central content-specific practices associated with English Language Arts (ELA), mathematics, and science as well as linguistic features that function in support of the language necessary to engage in such content-specific practices.

⁴ (Shyyan & Christensen, 2018)

⁵ (International Reading Association, 2009)

- Three ELP levels for each Alt EL Connector at each grade level/grade band address the question, “What might the language use look like at each level as an EL with significant cognitive disabilities progresses toward full participation in grade-appropriate activities?” The three levels are: low, mid, high.
- Consistent with the original LA Connectors for ELs, these Alt EL Connectors are interrelated and can be used separately or in combination.

Alt EL Connectors

Table 1: The Alt EL Connectors

Alt EL Connector	Description	
1	Construct meaning from oral presentations and literary and informational text through grade-appropriate listening, reading, and viewing.	Standards 1-7 involve the language necessary for ELs with significant disabilities to engage in the central content-specific practices associated with ELA, mathematics, and science. They begin with a focus on extracting meaning and then progress to engagement in these practices.
2	Participate in grade-appropriate oral and written exchanges of information, ideas, and analyses, responding to peer, audience, or reader comments and questions.	
3	Speak and write about grade-appropriate complex literary and informational texts and topics.	
4	Construct grade-appropriate oral and written claims.	
5	Conduct research and evaluate and communicate findings to answer questions or solve problems.	
6	Analyze and critique the arguments of others orally and in writing.	
7	Adapt language choices to purpose, task, and audience when speaking and writing.	
8	Determine the meaning of words and phrases in oral presentations and literary and informational text.	Standards 8-10 focus on some of the micro-level linguistic features and serve the other seven standards.
9	Create clear and coherent grade-appropriate speech and text.	
10	Make accurate use of standard English to communicate in grade-appropriate speech and writing.	

(CCSSO, 2014)

Table 2: Organization of the Alt EL Connectors by Modality and Domain

Modalities*	Domains	Alt EL Connector	
<p>Receptive modalities: This mode refers to the learner as a reader or listener/viewer working with “text” whose author or deliverer is not present or accessible. It presumes that the interaction is with authentic written or oral documents where language input is meaningful and content laden. The learner brings background knowledge, experience, and appropriate interpretive strategies to the task to promote understanding of language and content in order to develop a personal reaction.</p>	Listening and Reading	1	Construct meaning from oral presentations and literary and informational text through grade-appropriate listening, reading, and viewing.
		8	Determine the meaning of words and phrases in oral presentations and literary and informational text.
<p>Productive modalities: This model places the learner as speaker and writer for a “distant” audience, one with whom interaction is not possible or limited. The communication is set for a specified audience, has purpose, and generally abides by rules of genre or style. It is a planned or formalized speech act or written document, and the learner has an opportunity to draft, get feedback, and revise, before publication or broadcast.</p>	Speaking and Writing	3	Speak and write about grade-appropriate complex literary and informational texts and topics.
		4	Construct grade-appropriate oral and written claims.
		7	Adapt language choices to purpose, task, and audience when speaking and writing.
<p>Interactive modalities: Collaborative use of receptive and productive modalities. This mode refers to the learner as a speaker/listener, where negotiation of meaning may be observed. The exchange will provide evidence of awareness of the socio-cultural aspects of communication as language proficiency develops.</p>	Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing	2	Participate in grade-appropriate oral and written exchanges of information, ideas, and analyses, responding to peer, audience, or reader comments and questions.
		5	Conduct research and evaluate and communicate findings to answer questions or solve problems.
		6	Analyze and critique the arguments of others orally and in writing.

*Contingent upon accessibility to the learner.

(Phillips, 2008, p. 96)

Standards 9-10 are not shown in this table because they address linguistic structure.

How to Use

The Alt EL Connectors should be used in combination with the appropriate [academic standards](#) for students with significant cognitive disabilities as indicated on their student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP). These connectors address the learner’s diverse needs and promote a rigorous and engaging learning environment uniquely designed to support the student’s academic growth and progress towards grade level and language goals and objectives.

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Resources

[LDOE EL Library](#)
[LDOE Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities Library](#)
[Identifying and Supporting ELs with Disabilities Guidance](#)
[LEAP Connect Assessment Guide](#)