SAN FELIPE DEL RIO C.I.S.D.
English Learner Programs
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is the Accelerated Language Program (ALP)?
The ALP is a refined version of what has typically been referred to in the district as Bilingual or ESL. The ALP can best be understood as an extended amount of time during the day (up to four hours for some students) where English learners are taught English as a foreign language. Much like immersion language programs in other countries, this program seeks to substantially accelerate the rate of English learning for students who score at the lowest two levels of TELPAS. Essentially, these students lack the foundational English language and grammar skills to meaningfully participate in most areas of their grade-level core content. ALP is designed, consistent with state law, to be an intensive program that lasts one year or less. Some students who do not meet the exit criteria may participate for a second year.

What are the goals of the Accelerated Language Program (ALP)?
Quite simply, the first goal is to rapidly develop students' English listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. To do this, an emphasis is placed on the teaching of discrete English grammar skills, like forming sentences, pronunciation, verb conjugation and vocabulary. The second goal is for students to work on core content at their language ability level. It is vital that teachers understand both of these goals in this order. In simple terms, the ALP is an accelerated English-language teaching program that seeks to build a solid linguistic foundation so students are able to do grade-level core content as soon as possible.

Where did the ALP idea come from?
Across the country, immersion English programs for English learners are increasingly seen as the most viable way to accelerate language learning for these students. In addition to the direction provided by the district Superintendent in this area, all site and district administrators met for more than 50 hours during the 2009-10 school year to review and explore in more depth both the district's historical program options for English learners, as well as our future direction. This program is based on a set of beliefs and principles articulated by that group, one of which is that the district's English learners are capable of learning English at a much faster rate than typically accepted. Of course, language immersion programs like this one have been in existence for decades in many countries.

Why do we need this program? Weren't we already doing English Language Development (ELD)?
Yes and no. While many teachers at most sites were working hard to teach English to our English learners, classroom observations and discussions with teachers and administrators revealed that the approaches, materials, time allocations and goals were quite different from site to site, and even from teacher to teacher. In short, we have typically lacked a district-wide philosophy of language instruction that would serve to unify staff, and accelerate progress for students. For English learners to fully maximize their language learning, it is critical that they participate in a well-designed, coherent district program.

What is the "Transitional English" Program?
This program is for English learners at higher levels of TELPAS, but who have not met the criteria for reclassification as a fluent-English proficient student. This program features two or three hours of grammar-based ELD instruction that follows a clear sequence of instructional goals, methods and materials. In addition, these students study grade-level core content that is modified by teachers who use instructional methods commonly known as Sheltered-Instruction or Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE).

Why all the emphasis on ELD? Isn't ELD the same as language arts?
This is a popular misconception. While English language arts instruction (ELA) certainly has many components that help students to use English better, its focus is more on application of skills, or extending existing skills. Effective ELD, on the other hand, is more like foreign language instruction, where the emphasis is on teaching students how English is constructed and used. This shouldn't be confused with dry grammar teaching, but should be understood as the clear and discrete teaching of a sequential set of skills that provides the linguistic foundation for other subjects like language arts and other content areas.

How long is the ELD time? And what am I supposed to do during that time?
The actual amount of time that is to be dedicated to ELD in the ALP is up to four hours in most cases. Professional development for teachers working in this program will spell out clearly the methods and materials used during this block of intensive English language instruction.

For students in the *Transitional English Program*, the time could be as much as two to three hours daily. This time would be dedicated to teaching advanced English language skills that are requisite for content area studies, including advanced verb tenses, sentence structure and specialized vocabulary. Teachers will be provided clear guidance in the skills and methods to be used for this instructional period.

What materials do I need?
Materials are only one part of a complete and coherent instructional program for English learners. Unfortunately, we have traditionally overstated the role of materials in actually teaching students to use English in academic settings. Many of the materials that will be used during ELD are already available to teachers in the district. What has been missing, however, is a clear guide to the specific language skills that students should be taught, and a workable inventory of research-based methods for accelerating English learning. The district is finalizing a simple, easy-to-understand guide for teachers that lists the discrete English language skills students should be taught based on their TELPAS levels. In this way, language instruction becomes more sequential and easier to plan.

How will we know if students are learning English?
In addition to the state-required assessments for measuring English language growth, each student enrolled in either the *Accelerated Language Program* or the *Transitional English Program* will be assessed for their mastery of English phonology, morphology, syntax and vocabulary at 10-week intervals. These tests will present a clear profile of the students' developing control of these essential elements of language. Additionally, students will be assessed for their ability to use these skills in productive language tasks,

most specifically writing. The scores are easy to understand, and can be reported on a simple ELD progress report for parents and others.

What is the legal background for these programs?

As most teachers know, the legal framework for educating English learners sometimes seems confusing and contradictory. Unfortunately, in a great many forums, the actual federal and state requirements for educating these students gets mixed together with ideology, personal preferences and just plain old urban mythology. In actuality, the legal framework is fairly straightforward and based on common sense. At the federal level, districts must organize programs that meet three criteria: first, the district's program design must be based on "some sound theory". Two basic options are available here: provide an intensive English immersion program designed to accelerate English, or provide instruction in students' home language. The first option is referred to in the legal literature as a *sequential* program, while the second is called a *simultaneous* design.

The second federal criterion is that districts allocate sufficient resources to the implementation of their chosen "sound theory." This refers to issues like teacher and administrator training, materials and time. The third and final federal requirement is that districts monitor their program for its effectiveness, and that improvements are continually made based on those findings. This federal framework derives from an important court case known as *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981, 648 F.2d 989).

Most recently, the U.S. Supreme Court (*Horne v. Flores, 2009*) clarified the important role districts must play in teaching students the English language. They emphasized the legal responsibility districts have for teaching the English language in an accelerated way so that students can participate more meaningfully in core content instruction. In their written opinion, the justices were heavy in their criticism of districts that have attempted for decades to implement bilingual education programs that produced only limited results at great cost. Instead, the justices reviewed favorably the intensive English immersion program implemented over the past two years in the state of Arizona.

How will students in these programs be prepared for TEKS, and other academic performance measures?

For students to do well on any test administered in English, they must possess two key areas of knowledge. First, they must possess an inventory of English language skills that allows them to understand, speak, read and write the English language at least at a level commensurate to the level of the material covered by the test. Second, they must have some knowledge of the content. In a sequential program like ours (*ALP* and *Transitional English* programs), emphasis is placed on the development of the foundational English language skills that students must first possess in order to have even a chance of meaningfully interacting with the content information. In simple terms, by accelerating the development of English, we are better equipping our students with the language knowledge and skills to be able to participate meaningfully in grade-appropriate content studies. Logically, if they understand more of the content instruction, they will able to perform higher on any test administered to them in the English language.

ELD Program

2010-2011

- **Accelerated Language Program (ALP)**
  - 4 Hour Block
  - Beginner/Low Intermediate

- **Transitional English Program 1**
  - 3 Hour Block
  - High Intermediate/Advanced

- **Transitional English Program 2**
  - 2 Hour Block
  - Advanced High